

PASKUHAN 2023: Witnessing the Joy of Christmas

**"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God
for all the things they had heard and seen..." (Lk 2:20).**

The theme "*Witnessing the Joy of Christmas*" draws inspiration from Luke 2:8-20, which recounts the profound and transformative experience of the shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem, where they encountered the newborn Jesus in the manger, and upon seeing Him, they were filled with great joy.

Ordinary Shepherds

The shepherds were not among the religious elite or high-ranking officials of their time; rather, they were considered ordinary working-class people. They were diligently tending and guarding flocks of sheep during a night shift when an angel of the Lord appeared to them and proclaimed the birth of Jesus as 'good news that will cause great joy for all the people' (Lk 2:10). This angelic revelation to ordinary men underscores that the message of Christ's birth is intended for everyone, regardless of social standing. They "...were among the poor, the simple souls whom Jesus would bless, because to them above all is granted access to the mystery of God (cf. Lk 10:21f.). They represent the *poor of Israel*, the poor in general: God's first love."¹

Responsive Shepherds

The shepherds' watchfulness allowed them to receive God's call by perceiving the signs of His presence. The shepherds responded to the angel's message with unwavering faith and enthusiasm. They did not hesitate or doubt the angel's proclamation; instead, they acted promptly, saying to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about' (Lk 2:15). Their immediate response reflects their deep faith and eagerness to witness the joyous event firsthand.

Witnessing Shepherds

Upon arriving in Bethlehem and seeing the baby Jesus lying in a manger, their joy would have been overwhelming. They were not merely witnessing a historic moment but also encountering the fulfillment of prophecies and the embodiment of hope for salvation. Their joy at seeing the Christ child was a deeply spiritual and emotional experience.

Preaching Shepherds

The shepherds bore witness to the joy of the First Christmas. They did not keep their experience to themselves, but instead '... returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen...' (Lk 2:20). They became messengers of this incredible joy, 'spread[ing] the word concerning what had been told them about this child' (Lk 2:17), preaching the good news to others. The shepherds' testimony helped others understand the significance of Christ's birth and serves as a powerful reminder of how encountering Christ can bring immense joy and inspire a lifelong commitment to share that joy to the world.

Conclusion: *Thomasian Shepherds*

May the Thomasian community be inspired by the shepherds' story. May we all experience the transformative power of encountering Christ and commit ourselves to sharing the joyful message of Christ's love to the world.

¹ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Infancy Narratives*, 2012, p. 58.