

A Shepherd For My People
Matthew 2:1-12
Key Verse: 2:6

by Teddy Hembekides

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."

Today we are here to celebrate the birth of Jesus-- the Shepherd of our souls. The story of the Magi is a beautiful story of God's promise fulfilled-- God's age old promise to send a Ruler who would be the Savior Shepherd of all people. The Magi were Gentiles from the east who traveled a very long way for a very long time and faced many a hardship and spared no expense. They set out on a pilgrimage in search of the newborn King of the Jews. They were searching for the One True God. They were in search of the Shepherd of their souls. When they arrived in Jerusalem, and asked of the whereabouts of the newborn king, the Tyrant king Herod was troubled at the news of a rival king. He then called some Bible teachers together and demanded to have an impromptu Bible study. His Bible study wasn't a sincere study to know the truth. He only wanted some information in order to achieve his own selfish purpose. He wanted to know where the Promised Savior King was born. He reminds us of those who are teaching Bible with a promise for prosperity and success rather than for repentance and faith and the kingdom of God. Here is what the Bible experts found out for him. The words in our key verse (6) are from the Book of Micah the prophet. They promise the coming of a Shepherd-like King "who will be the shepherd of [his] people Israel." Jesus came into the world as a Good Shepherd. Jesus declared: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (Jn 10:11) Let's see how Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

First, Shepherd Jesus is Immanuel, which means that Jesus is God with us. But for Jesus to come and to be with us, the cost was terribly high! Jesus needed to renounce his throne in heaven, to give up his privileges as a King, and then to become a man. And so, the Apostle John tells us that "The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (Jn. 1:14) Jesus, who is the embodiment of God's word, needed to take on human form. And so the Christmas prophesy tells us that, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel-- which means, 'God with us.'" (Matthew 1:23) God did so for many reasons, but on top of the list was because he knew how much his people needed a shepherd. Living in this world darkened by sin, is like living life with the lights switch off. Not knowing where we were, not knowing which way to go. So God promised a guide, a Shepherd for his people. And in his wisdom and love he sent Jesus to be the Shepherd of our souls.

When Jesus came to be with his people, they were wretched. They were living sinful lives against the truth of God. But Jesus did not see them as wretched. Jesus saw them with the eyes of compassion. And his heart went out to them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So, Jesus began to serve them with the love and compassion of a shepherd. And the world had never known a Shepherd like Jesus. Even one encounter with Jesus tells the whole story about the Shepherd Jesus. One time a man covered with leprosy knelt before Jesus and pleaded "if you are willing you can make me clean." (Mtt. 8:2-3) No one suffered more than a leper did in those days. His disease was debilitating and terminal. His disease was shameful, perhaps like modern day AIDS. No one needed more comfort and support than this leper man. But instead he was consigned to pain and to misery; to shame and death. Whenever anyone saw him, they would hurl stones at him to drive him away. But this leper took a risk to his dying life, and came to Jesus. And here's what Jesus did. Jesus reached out his hand and touched the leper, "I am willing", he said... "Be clean". Jesus touched his sores. Jesus healed his sores. Jesus the good Shepherd became Immanuel to this leper-- God with him. How many of us have running sores in our hearts! How many of us are ashamed of the sores that run deep in our lives-- sores we'd rather die than have exposed, let alone be touched. How long shall we ignore these sores or hide them? Isn't it time to kneel before our Shepherd Jesus and have him cleanse and heal them! And may he be Immanuel-- God with you.

Before his life was changed by his Shepherd Jesus, Matthew was known as Levi the tax collector. Levi was infected with spiritual leprosy-- the kind of leprosy that infects the soul with selfishness and with greed. And as this disease progressed within him, it disfigured his soul. Until Levi became hideous on the inside, a man so damaged by greed and selfishness that even he could not remember what he was like before this spiritual leprosy took him. But Levi's soul wasn't so bad at one time. He must have been an ordinary young man with some noble dreams and aspirations. As he was growing up, he witnessed his parents suffering to make ends meet. He witnessed their sacrifices what

little they had they shared with the needy people in their church community. And rather than learning his parents' spirit of love and sacrifice, Levi vowed to make lots of money by extorting from those who failed to pay their mortgage. He did not consider at what cost it would be to let such an unholy desire take root in his heart and soul. The cost was high-- very high. Eventually Levi took a job as a tax collector. He made money. But at what cost? Jesus once asked: "What can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:37) Levi exchanged his soul for money. His spiritual disease of leprosy marred his heart and soul beyond human recognition. For when a person loses his soul for something less, for money or for pleasure or for any of the unholy desires of the heart, that person becomes on the inside like a decaying dead thing. Levi had become like that.

One day Jesus passed by Levi's tax booth. Jesus looked on him with the compassion of a shepherd for his lost sheep. Jesus saw his suffering. Jesus saw the wounds that his disease of selfishness had left on his heart and soul. And Jesus also saw a helpless man crying out for a shepherd's love and compassion-- and desperate for spiritual guidance. And Jesus the Good Shepherd loved him. And with great compassion Jesus said: "Follow me." (Lk 5:27) To Matthew's ears, it was the voice of God. When Levi followed Jesus leaving everything behind, his whole life changed. Jesus called him and bore all his weaknesses and transgressions until he was changed into Saint Matthew who later wrote the gospel of Matthew through which countless people found their way back to God through the good Shepherd Jesus.

Many young people today are like Levi who from a young age have ambition to make money. They think that if they have money, money would solve all their problems and make them happy. But even if they achieve their dreams of making much money, although money can buy them a nice car, they find that money cannot solve their broken-heart problem. So many come from broken homes. So many are the product of long and drawn out divorce battles. Many are damaged from years of being left alone to fend for themselves. When they needed guidance for life, no one was found to guide them. Who can heal them? Who can mend their broken hearts? Though they may be abandoned by everyone, Jesus never abandons them. Jesus came to this world to be their shepherd. He came to be their Immanuel God-- God who is with them. To them Jesus also says: "Come follow me." (Mtt 4:19)

Second, Jesus is our Shepherd who redeemed us from the power of sin and death. Since the fall, sin came into the world, and into our hearts and lives. And in sin, all people lived and died without hope of redemption. There is nothing a person can do to overcome the temptation of sin in our lives. We are helpless to help ourselves when it comes to sin. But the good Shepherd Jesus came to deliver us from the power of sin. He came to give his life as an atonement for our sins. On the cross the good Shepherd Jesus shed his blood to wipe our sins away. Isaiah the prophet describes the good Shepherd Jesus like this: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Is. 53:4-5) When we stand at the foot of the cross, we must behold the Shepherd who died in our place. We must stand in awe at the Shepherd whose blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. The Good Shepherd wants us to come to the cross to confess our sins, to repent of them, that he might pour forgiveness into our hearts. For only in forgiveness can we find deliverance from our sins.

There was a woman who was consumed with the sin of adultery. She must have been a beautiful woman who enjoyed the looks all the men gave her as she walked down the street. So she flirted with every man who looked at her with desire in his eyes. She had no intention of gratifying her desires not the desires of the men who liked her. But somehow one day she went a little too far, and ended up giving herself to a man. She swore she would never again sleep with another man. But soon, she broke her promise and committed sin again. Finally she became ensnared in a life of adultery and lost her dignity as a woman all together. And then her worst nightmare came to pass. She was caught and now she was on the verge of being condemned to death. But when Jesus saw her, he did not condemn her. With the compassion and love of a father for his daughter, Jesus said to her: "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin." (Jn 8:11) Jesus forgave her. Jesus also liberated her from a living under the power of sin. Now she was able to overcome her sinful desire and begin to live the holy life God wanted her to live.

There is a lie that many seem to be deceived by-- that we can stop sinning whenever we choose to. But no one can stop sinning on their own. Who can stop lusting when they want to! Who can stop doing dark things in secret places! Who can stop spending hours on internet pornography just by choosing to! It's as absurd as a heroin addict or an alcoholic who say they can stop any time they want to! Only Shepherd Jesus, our shepherd has the power to free us from sins that have taken over our lives. Only Jesus our shepherd has the authority to forgive our sins and to lead us

out of a life in sin and into a life in Christ. Jesus can do so because Jesus is the good Shepherd of our souls who has solved our sin problem through his death on the cross.

Third, Jesus our Shepherd rose from the dead and gave us a living hope in the kingdom of God. When Jesus came to be our Shepherd, humanity was lost in the darkness of this world. Sin ruled people's hearts and kept them slaves to its power. No one was able to overcome the power of sin in their lives. In such a gloomy situation, there was no hope. No one could have hope! And no one had vision. Through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus forgave our sins. How precious is forgiveness! But-- it was not enough! Jesus needed to defeat the power of sin. And he did! Through his resurrection, Jesus shattered the power of sin and death-- which held us captive to fatalism and despair. Jesus delivered us from the power of sin! Jesus freed us in order that we might live no longer in sin but live for God and for his glory. Even more! Jesus' resurrection restored true hope to our hearts-- a living hope of the kingdom of God. With this living hope, we who were confined by the power of sin to crawl on our belly, can now soar like eagles. With this living hope we no longer live in the fear of death but we live in the hope of serving God. And after a lifetime of serving God, we rise to be with Jesus forever in his kingdom.

We need the living hope which only Jesus can restore to our hearts. The world lives in dead hopes and the world perishes with its decaying hopes. Today we see people living without meaning nor purpose. We see people living without hope not vision for their lives. We see them living with no security nor assurance. We see old people whose highest hope is get their social security check come on time. We see young people whose greatest aspiration in life is to find some comfort in the arms of a girl or boy. We see fear and anxiety on the faces of men and women who look 20 years older than they really are. We see teenagers making wrong decisions of life that ruin their future and remove any hope they may have for living a decent life. But the good Shepherd Jesus came to restore living hope. He came to rekindle vision in our hearts. Jesus the good Shepherd called disciples to his side and taught them the word of God. It was the best way to plant hope in their hearts. Soon they could see hope for themselves to grow as his successors. Jesus also taught them to look beyond the mundane world. Soon they could see the kingdom of God with eyes of their hearts. Because of this renewed hope and vision, they could live the life of faith and sacrifice that Jesus had called them to live. For this hope and vision, they could give up all things in this world and fully give themselves to serving the gospel. For this hope and vision they could also do as Jesus did, offer their lives to the raising of disciples among all people of all nations. Jesus the Good Shepherd raised them to be good shepherds like himself.

I grew up in the war ravaged country of Lebanon. I saw countless children orphaned by war. So when I came to the USA to finish my studies, my great hope was to return to Lebanon and be an orphanage director. But God called me to Bible study during my college years. Through Bible study, he showed me that I myself had been a spiritual orphan who could not even help myself. In the past I tried to change myself through traveling here and there, thinking that if I move to a different places, I would be able to change my inner person. But it never worked. Then through Bible study the Good Shepherd Jesus alone was able to change me miraculously. He changed me from a orphanage director candidate to a shepherd of spiritual orphans who need the word of God more than just a sandwich. I praise Jesus my good Shepherd who gave me a living hope to be a good shepherd like himself and to raise good shepherds in this generation.

Fourth, Shepherd Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to be with his people-- forever. The Christmas prophesy promises the coming of "... a ruler who will be the shepherd of [his] people ..." (6b) And in time the Lord Jesus was born to the human race. And he became the Shepherd of his people. And in time they recognized him not only as the Good Shepherd, but also as Immanuel because Jesus was God with his people-- God with us. But that's not all. Jesus made yet another promise when he declared, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Mtt. 28:20) But how could the Shepherd Jesus always be us? During his earthly ministry, Jesus promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to live in his people, and so to be with us always. The Holy Spirit empowers us to be witnesses for our Shepherd-- to witness to the world that our Shepherd Jesus is the Savior who saves us and all people from sin-- to witness that he alone is worthy of our worship and our most treasured gifts-- to witness that he is forever Immanuel, God with us-- the Shepherd who is with you and with me always.