

SHEPHERDS, STEREOTYPES, AND SOCIETY'S OUTCASTS

by Brian Hackman

KEY VERSE:

Luke 2:10-11

But the angel said to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

FAITH STORY:

Luke 2:1-20

FAITH FOCUS:

Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem, where Mary gives birth to Jesus in a place normally reserved for animals. Shepherds are watching their sheep during the night in fields not far from Jesus' birthplace, and an angel of the Lord appears to them, bringing the good news that the Messiah is born in the town of Bethlehem. The shepherds are intrigued and go to see this newborn baby. After witnessing what the angel of the Lord told them, the shepherds are overwhelmed with joy that what they were told by the angel was true. The shepherds spread the good news with the community of Bethlehem.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students break down stereotypes and strengthen their relationships with other people.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Students will hear examples of when stereotypes were put on people, and when it was hard to relate to others.
- Students will discuss the significance of the setting that Jesus was born in.
- Students will articulate the barriers and stereotypes we put on people who are different.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1** Bibles
- 2** Pencils, paper
- 3** **Optional:** the movie Remember the Titans. You will need to watch the movie prior to class and choose one or more scenes that illustrate the points made in this session.
- 4** Candles
- 5** **Music:** The Christmas Song by Dave Matthews (This is optional, if you know Dave Matthews music would appeal to your youth than use it—make sure to read over the lyrics before you play the song.)
- 6** CD player

- 7 Newsprint, paint and markers
- 8 Magazines, newspapers and glue

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–10 minutes)

Option 1: Show one or more clips from the movie *Remember the Titans* and discuss what happened in those scenes.

Option 2: Give students newspapers and newsmagazines. Tape newsprint to the wall—one page says IN at the top and another says OUT. Ask students to cut out and glue to the newsprint examples of people that are “IN” with the majority of North American society, and those that are “OUT” of the status quote of North American society.

CONNECT: (5 minutes)

Typically, in most high schools there are students who are hard to get along with, and who make you feel you need to have certain standards in order to hang out with them. Take a few minutes to write down the person(s) in your school that you find it hard to relate to. This will be personal information that you won’t have to share with others.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (20–30 minutes)

Say: We are going to hear a very familiar story, but before we do, I want you to know something about shepherds in Palestine 2000 years ago. Shepherds were kind of like our modern-day migrant workers—they had jobs that many people didn’t want. They were seen as “unclean” and couldn’t even go into the synagogue. To be a shepherd in those days was to be in a lower class of society—somebody that most people did not want to relate to. Now, let’s see what happened to the shepherds in our story.

Read the scripture passage together, Luke 2:1-10.

Divide the class into groups based on what they would like to do:

- 1 Write a rap song from the perspective of the shepherds—what they saw, what they did, what they thought about this whole strange sequence of events.
- 2 Create a skit that tells the story from the shepherd’s perspective. The story should include “reading between the lines” of the scripture passage. What did they do when the angels showed up? Did they argue later about if they were seeing things? What did they think when they got to the stable?
- 3 Paint or cartoon the shepherd’s story. See suggestions in #2.

After each group has completed their activity, share them with the whole class.

APPLY: (5–10 minutes)

Say: We’ve tried to look at this story from the perspective of the outcasts—the shepherds—and we’ve seen that they are the ones with whom God chose to share the news of Jesus’ birth. Who do you think are the “shepherds” in today’s society—in your school, community,

our church, the world? Who are the people that are hard to get along with or that are not accepted? What keeps us from connecting to those people? How can we do a better job of relating to the shepherds and the outcasts that we know? What would Jesus want us to do?

Note to teacher: Refer back to the IN and OUT list or to the movies clips as you apply this discussion to your students today.

RESPOND: (10 minutes)

Option 1: Gather in a circle and place several candles in the middle to represent the Light of Christ. Allow for some silent time for students to pray and to contemplate the outsiders that they know and how they could respond to them. Invite students to pray out loud after several minutes of silence, and end with your own prayer.

Option 2: If your students enjoy Dave Matthews' music, play The Christmas Song. Reflect on the key points of the song.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

We can find three aspects to Luke's Christology in our story today. The first part of Luke's Christology talks about who Jesus is: Jesus is of the house of David, he is savior, he is Christ, (Messiah) he is Lord. Matthew or Mark did not write this in their books. The second part of Luke's Christology focuses on Jesus' role in bringing peace. The heavenly host sings of peace that God expresses to persons and societies. This peace occurs through rebuilding a balance in all forces in creation and humanity. (Craddock, 36). The third part of Luke's Christology is centered on the shepherds, showing that Jesus cares for all persons.

WORKS CITED:

Craddock, Fred. **Luke Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for teaching and Preaching.** Louisville: Jonaknox, 1990.

NRSV Harper Study Bible. Lindsell, Harold. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989.