

December 30, 2020 - Reflection

Now out in the fields, there were shepherds ...
Images of hope in the midst of the Pandemic

A Reflection on Luke 2: 8

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields,
keeping watch over their flock by night.

Text in Context

Luke 2: 8-20

The Shepherds and the Angels

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom God favors!”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



OUTSIDE

SOME PEOPLE SEE THINGS OTHER PEOPLE DON'T

The Shepherds are living “outside” as they care for their flocks. While this imagery strikes us as gentle, we can only imagine how harsh it must be to live “outside” with the conveniences of shelter and security. Pope Francis has suggested that the Shepherds must smell like the flock. We are all shepherds called to care for one another. Sometimes this calling invites us to go “outside” bearing the elements of other people’s afflictions and struggles.

The “fields” can be harsh. Mud, rain, cold, and uncertainty chart the day. We need only think of those who work the land and hand pick the crops so we may eat and enjoy and be satisfied. Our food is born of the sweat of others who the powerful often scorn and greedy frequently abuse with unjust wages and inhumane working conditions.

To these, the Angels are still appearing and singing “Glory!” If we praise God in heaven, we commit ourselves to seeking justice on Earth. We can encounter the Shepherds in the manger of our streets and beneath the bridges of abandonment in them we see and touch the Flesh of Christ our Lord.



And all the homeless and ostracized persons who roam the streets of our cities. ... How many times do we see poor people rummaging through garbage bins to retrieve what others have discarded as superfluous, in the hope of finding something to live on or to wear ... They themselves become part of a human garbage bin; they are treated as refuse, without the slightest sense of guilt on the part of those who are complicit in this scandal.

... We can never elude the urgent appeal that Scripture makes on behalf of the poor ... the situation of the poor obliges us not to keep our distance from the body of the Lord, who suffers in them.

Pope Francis
Rome on Christmas Day 2020

Oh! Come Let Us Adore Him

THE IDENTITY OF THE SHEPHERDS

In the long history of interpretation, the shepherds of Luke 2: 8 have been identified as thieves, insurrectionists, humble, poor, oppressed, liberators, and those responsible with providing the Temple with the Paschal Lamb for Passover.

Luke simply states the shepherds, no matter how they be interpreted, were “caring” for their flocks by night. The imagery of “watching over” and “caring for” touches us deeply. Mary and Joseph care for and watch over Jesus. Shepherds of every type are called to watch over and for their flocks of every type.

The shepherds of Luke 2: 8 provide an example of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Are we not called to “watch over” and “care for” one another especially in times of trouble?

The pivotal function of the shepherds invites investigation of their larger role, and in order to understand this, one must look to their status in society. Shepherds in an agrarian society may have small landholdings, but these would be inadequate to meet the demands of their own families, the needs of their own agricultural pursuits, and the burden of taxation. As a result, they might hire themselves out to work for wages. They were, then, peasants, located toward the bottom of the scale of power and privilege.⁴⁰ That they are here cast in this dress is unmistakable, for the same contrast introduced in Mary’s Song—the enthroned versus the lowly (1:52)—is represented here: Augustus the Emperor and Quirinius on one hand (2:1–2), the shepherds on the other. As the recipients of a divine visitation, the shepherds are highly esteemed in the world of the birth narrative. This is not an esteem shared by the rulers of 2:1–2; their power is relativized and they receive no news of this divine intervention. Good news comes to peasants, not rulers; the lowly are lifted up.

Green, J. B. (1997). *The Gospel of Luke* (pp. 130–131).
Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

THE CHILD WHO WOULD BE SHEPHERD

But among you it will be different.
Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank,
and the leader should be like a servant.

Luke 22: 26

Faithful shepherds are always found the fields caring for and watching over others. They often do so at their own expense following, whether they know it or not. The teachings of the Child who became the Shepherd of us all. Let us now consider four contemporary Shepherds who serve in the fields of pandemic, injustice, oppression, and marginalization.

SHEPHERDS ALL

“I can clearly see that what the Church needs today is the ability to heal wounds and warm the hearts of faithful, it needs to be by their side. I see the Church as a field hospital after a battle. It’s pointless to ask a seriously injured patient whether his cholesterol or blood sugar levels are high! It’s his wounds that need to be healed. The rest we can talk about later. Now we must think about treating those wounds. And we need to start from the bottom.”

**Pope Francis to Antonio Spadaro
August 2013**

Let us consider four person who “watched over” and “cared for” others in this time of loss and sorrow:

1) Bishop who always wanted to a milkman:



Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the Polish prelate who leads Pope Francis's charitable efforts, says he once dreamed of being a milkman. Now his dream has come true! The Cardinal drives hundreds of miles a day through the empty streets of the Italian capital, picking up food from factories and businesses and delivering them personally to the city's poor.

“I made a tour around the Roman parishes today,” he told *Crux* on Sunday. “I told them that washing the feet of those in need is like consecration during Eucharist.” He urged priests under lockdown to open their showers to the poor, “respecting all procedures of protection” from the coronavirus. “I went to one friary – I asked – how many of you are there? They said 20. It is 20 men that can serve the poor! We don’t need to put our lay volunteers in danger, the Churchmen can do it!”

**Paulina Guzik
March 30, 2020
CRUX CONTRIBUTOR**

2) Mother crying out for justice as her son languished

God speaks through you

Unarmed Black man Jacob Blake was shot several times as he opened the door of his car in Kenosha, Wisconsin, on Sunday, August 23, 2020

By Saumya Dixit

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MEAWW.COM



(Getty Images/Brandon Bell)

Unarmed Black man Jacob Blake was shot several times as he opened the door of his car in Kenosha, Wisconsin, on Sunday, August 23, 2020. The video of the incident went viral and at least seven shots were heard in the clip where White cops fired at him. Two days after the incident, Jacob's family made a public speech and delivered a message of peace. Jacob is undergoing treatment at present.

Jacob's mother, Julia Jackson, talked about the destruction throughout the city that has been happening since her son was shot. She said, "We really just need prayers." "As I was riding through here, the city, I noticed a lot of damage. It doesn't reflect my son or my family. If Jacob knew what was going on as far as that goes – the violence and the destruction – he would be very displeased." With tears in her eyes, she added, "I am really asking and encouraging everyone in Wisconsin and abroad to take a moment and examine your heart ... do Jacob justice on this level and examine your heart. We need healing."

Jacob's father, Jacob Blake Sr, said, "I like to thank everyone for coming out in support of my son with this senseless attempted murder that was committed on him. They shot my son seven times, seven times. Like he didn't matter. But my son matters. He's a human being, and he matters."

As soon as the news broke out on Twitter, Julia won the hearts of the netizens with her words. One user commented, "#JacobBlake's mother Julia Jackson is Imploring people to 'examine your heart...We need to heal our country. Please let's begin to pray for healing for our nation. We are the United States of America but are we united?'" Another said, "God Bless Julia Jackson. Thank you for your wonderful heart, soul and spirit. We all needed to hear every word. God speaks through you." Another applauded her saying, "Jacob Blake's remarkable mother, Julia Jackson. I do not know how she found these words, this grace at this terrible time."

3) The doctor who hugged his elderly patient like a mother comforting her child

Patient was 'vulnerable' and 'lonely' when he received hug from doctor



Photographer Go Nakamura captured the image inside an intensive care unit in Houston on Nov. 26 — Thanksgiving Day. (Getty Images)

He told [USA TODAY](#) he has visited the ICU at United Memorial Medical Center about 20 times to document "people suffering and dying" as a result of the pandemic.

Nakamura said the patient in the viral photo was clearly feeling "vulnerable" and "lonely" when he received an embrace from Dr. Joseph Varon, the hospital's chief of staff.

"I am grateful to witness a wonderful moment and I thank all the medical staffs for their hard work even during the holiday season," Nakamura wrote on [Facebook](#).

Just a day before the photo was taken, Varon told CNN's [New Day](#) that the pandemic had pushed him to work for 251 days straight.

"It's taking a huge toll, not only on me," he said. "My nurses in the middle of the day, they will start crying, because they are getting so many patients, and it's a never-ending story."

"How have I done it? I don't know. I'm running out of fumes," he added. "I can't get a day off because nobody cares for the patients that I can care for."

Varon also emphasized how critical the next few months will be in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

"If we don't do things right, America is going to see the darkest days in modern American medical history," he said.

4) You

Saint Paul, recognizing the temptation of the earliest Christian communities to form closed and isolated groups, urged his disciples to abound in love "for one another and for all" (1 Thess 3:12). In the Johannine community, fellow Christians were to be welcomed, "even though they are strangers to you" (3 Jn 5). In this context, we can better understand the significance of the parable of the Good Samaritan: love does not care if a brother or sister in need comes from one place or another. For "love shatters the chains that keep us isolated and separate; in their place, it builds bridges. Love enables us to create one great family, where all of us can feel at home... Love exudes compassion and dignity".

Pope Francis
Fratelli Tutti #62
October 3, 2020

Thank you for being a cause of hope and healing in the World.

One person said to me, "I can't do much. I am grateful for those who help, like all the nurses and doctors. All I can do is say a prayer for them."

Thank you for being the hope that gives us the courage to hope.