

audience. Instead He shined His light on those who needed Him most. In Bethlehem it was a group of dirty, disrespected sheep herders. They were entrusted with the news of Christ's birth and joyfully told everyone, glorifying and praising God! Then Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a place of which Nathanael said to Phillip "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (Jhn 1:46) But God chose to shine His light where it was needed most- on those in the darkness.

Isaiah 9:1-2 NLT - 1 Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory. 2 The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.

Has God's light ever broken through darkness in your own life? Do you know of someone who was once hopeless, powerless, perhaps had given up on God or on life itself, but God lifted them out of darkness and gave them life and hope again? Pray together for those in darkness still, that God's light would break through for them.

WRAP-UP

The story of Jesus' birth reminds us that God works in unexpected ways. He came at an unexpected time, to an unexpected place and to an unexpected people. He still appears when we least expect Him, in the messy and the mundane and to the unworthy because that is where His light is needed most, to shine in their darkness.

Memory Verse

10 but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. 11 The Savior-- yes, the Messiah, the Lord--has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!"
- Luke 2:10-11 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members' needs: _____
Challenge- Be a light in the darkness by volunteering with New Life at the local warming shelter Dec 29 – Jan 4. newlifepismo.com/shelter.

"Unexpected" Once and Future #2

INTRODUCTION

If you know the story of Jesus' birth you are aware that the angels' announcement took place in a field to an obscure group of shepherds. We sit in a privileged position because we know the rest of the story. We read into the scriptures what we know now, and we are surprised when they don't get it. But God operates differently than we do. Who could have expected to find the Messiah in a stable? So even though this part of the story is familiar to us now, the story is not finished. In fact, Jesus has promised to return. But will we be expecting Him this time?

Ice Breaker (Optional—8 min)

When was the last time you welcomed an unexpected guest?

Luke 2:8-20 NLT - 8 That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. 9 Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, 10 but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. 11 The Savior-- yes, the Messiah, the Lord--has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! 12 And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others--the armies of heaven--praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased." 15 When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." 16 They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. 17 After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. 18 All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, 19 but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. 20 The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

STUDY QUESTIONS (45 MIN)

1. Unexpected Times

Around 420 BC God spoke through the prophet Malachi, and then He was silent. In the story of Luke it had been over 400 years since the people of Israel had heard God speak. Generations had come and gone, and all the while they awaited the promised Messiah.

Isaiah 55:8 NLT - 8 "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.

What we value and the ways we expect to get things done is not the way God tends to do things.

Most of us would have planned the arrival of the Messiah immediately after God's prophets had spoken, at the height of the people's anticipation. Do you think the shepherds were "watching and waiting"? How do you think a period of prolonged waiting affects our faith?

It is easy to lose that sense of expectancy when we wait for something promised long ago.

Do you remember when you first heard, "Jesus is coming back"? How did you react? How has time changed your response?

As we see so many of the world's events lining up with the Bible's prophecies of end times, you may be thinking, "It could happen soon."

2 Peter 3:3-4, 10 NLT - 3 Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. 4 They will say, "What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created." ... 10 But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.

The truth of 2 Peter 3 is as applicable today as it was when it was written. The return of Jesus is going to be "unexpected as a thief". While that is good news for believers it will mean judgment for unbelievers.

If you knew Jesus was going to return tomorrow, who is the first person you think of who needs to know that God loves them? Is there something you can do that will demonstrate God's love for them today, perhaps opening an opportunity for their salvation?

2. Unexpected Places

Luke 2:4 NLT - 4 And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.

Micah 5:2 NLT - 2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past.

The prophet Micah knew that the messiah would come from an unexpected place, the small village of Bethlehem. Luke 2:4 explains how that came about.

The Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Kings was born in a stable in an insignificant village. Certainly, that was an unexpected choice.

Today we expect to find God in our church sanctuaries, or gospel concerts, or perhaps at the historic sites in the Holy Land. But Jesus still appears in unexpected places.

What is one unlikely or unexpected place where you have seen Jesus "show up"? What is one unlikely place that you would like to invite Jesus into?

3. Unexpected People

God didn't announce Jesus' birth to the most powerful or even the most religious people. He wasn't focused on reaching the widest