

A Christmas Sabbath

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Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

*Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people...a Savior who is Christ the Lord."
(Luke 2:8-11).*

This familiar Christmas scripture passage has consistently conveyed a message of the ultimate hope and joy for me...a Savior who will pay the penalty for my sins. One day I will see Him face-to-face in Heaven. To whom, and the manner in which this message was delivered and received, was something that struck me anew this season. The message was delivered to shepherds. Humble men, with a quiet profession, who kept watch over their charge. Shepherds understood how to rest, to wait, and how to be vigilant for sights and sounds that might harm the animals they loved and cared for. The Lord chose to send His angel to stand before those whose minds and hearts were rested, and whose ears were accustomed to listening. Might it be, that the Lord knew that a rested soul is a receptive soul? That the soul that was familiar with quiet, could also become familiar with this message of His glory...of His great joy? A few hours prior to this, the innkeeper told Mary, the mother of Jesus that there was "no room" in the inn to give birth to her child. In contrast, did the Lord know that the rested mind of the shepherd "had room" for this news?

A Jewish understanding of Sabbath was that one day of the week was set aside to enjoy God and to enjoy each other in a spirit of rest. Adele Calhoun, in her book Spiritual Disciplines Handbook states that Jewish children woke on Sabbath morning to a day of delight and refreshment... "to a world they didn't make and a friendship with God they didn't earn." Lynne Baab in her work Sabbath Keeping echoes this view: "The Sabbath teaches us grace because it connects us experientially to the basic truth that nothing we do will earn God's love...the Sabbath nurtures relationships."

What if, this Christmas morning, we asked God to give us the Sabbath delight of the Jewish children, and the quiet soul of the shepherds? What if we asked Him to teach us how to bring rest to tired emotions, joy to tired hearts, and peace to worried minds? If we trusted Him to allow us to "be still and know that I am God," might we, like the shepherds, see the glory of God shine down on some troubled situation or relationship? And when the glory of God shines, when some hope breaks through the darkness of our trial, might we too, like the shepherds, react first with fear? Can we trust Him then, to speak great joy to those fears? We might then find ourselves running to meet the Christ child, to kneel before Him in holy awe. For just like the shepherds, who nestled their sheep between their

shoulders, so too, we, “the one the Lord loves...can rest between His shoulders.”
(Deuteronomy 33:12).

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