**JOURNEYING TOGETHER:** FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Session 3 of 4

# Shepherds

### MEETING AIM

To challenge the young people to take a closer look at what God is doing.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 2:8-20

### BACKGROUND

This session plan is intended for use either in-person or online, depending on how you’re meeting. Adapt the activities to fit your particular situation.

How wonderful that God allows such ordinary people to be the first witnesses to the birth of his Son. It’s always a huge encouragement that God seems so keen to involve ordinary, unremarkable people in his plans. This can be a scary experience, though. In Luke 2, it’s probably the spectacle of an angel appearing to them which scares the shepherds (vv9-10), but taking a close look at God’s plans can be scary in itself – it’s possible that God might ask us to get involved, instead of just looking. May we be just as courageous as the shepherds; just as ready to hurry off and see what God is doing.

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### STARTING OUT – 5 mins

Take this opportunity to catch up with your young people. As you chat and enjoy refreshments, ask the group members what they would do if they had no fear. If fear didn’t hold them back, what would they attempt? Would they try an extreme experience, like a parachute jump? Would they tell someone they know exactly what they think of them? Or would they do something that other people might think of as normal, but which a phobia usually prevents them from doing?

### INTRO ACTIVITY – 10 mins

**You will need:** sheep soft toys

Before the session, collect a few sheep soft toys. Eight or nine should be plenty. Parents of small children in your church may be able to help you. (Failing that, use other soft toys and just ask the young people to imagine these are sheep.)

Divide the young people into three small teams (or choose three volunteers to play). Send each team to a different corner of the room. Place the sheep in the centre. Explain that this session will focus on the shepherds in the Nativity story, so you’re all going to start by putting yourselves in the shepherds’ place. Challenge the teams to round up the sheep into their corner of the room.

On “go”, one player from each team runs to the middle of the room, collects a sheep and brings it back to their team’s corner, tagging the next player. The next player does the same and so on, until there are no sheep left in the middle. The next player must now collect a sheep from an opposing team’s corner instead. The first team to collect four sheep wins. If this seems too easy, ask them to collect five sheep.

### BIBLE EXPLORATION – 10 mins

**You will need:** Bibles; tea towels; string; scissors

If you have a large group, divide the young people into smaller groups (of four or five) for this activity. Give out Bibles and as many tea towels as you can find. If possible, give a tea towel to each of your group members.

Explain that in this activity, you’ll be trying to think like shepherds. Dressing the part is a good start, so ask the young people to begin by putting their tea towels on their heads, in the classic nativity-play style. Give out lengths of string to help the young people tie their tea towels in place.

Now ask the young people to read Luke 2:8-20. Encourage them to think like shepherds – to put themselves in the shepherds’ place. Ask them to comment on what they can see, hear, smell and feel at different points in the story. The text suggests the shepherds are scared (vv9-10), so what are they scared of? And why are they in such a hurry to go and see what’s happening in Bethlehem (vv15-16)?

### CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

If they haven’t already done so, invite the young people to take off their tea towels. It’s now time to step back from the shepherds’ point of view and be slightly more objective. Talk over some ‘why’ questions with the group:

* Why do you think God chose to make these shepherds the first witnesses to his Son being born? (These were seriously ordinary, down-to-earth people. Why would God choose them?)
* Why does that matter to us?
* Why were the shepherds so quick to run off to Bethlehem?
* Why might they have chosen not to go?
* Why might we sometimes hold back from taking a look at what God is doing? (Might we be afraid of what we may see?)

### CREATIVE RESPONSE – 10 mins

**You will need:** parental permission; sufficient insurance

As a group, take a short walk around your neighbourhood. As you walk, talk together about what you can see and about what you think God is doing in your community. Where do you think God wants you to go? What do you think he wants to show you?

Before the session, you’ll need to make sure you have permission from parents and carers to take the young people out of the building, and that your church insurance covers you to do so.

### PRAYER – 5 mins

**You will need:** olive oil

Explain that however good God’s plans are, it’s sometimes scary to look too closely at them. If we take a close look at God’s plans, there’s always a chance that those plans will demand something from us – we might find ourselves getting involved in God’s plans, instead of just watching from the side lines. Let’s pray that God will give us the same courage he gave the shepherds, so that we’ll be just as eager as they were to see what he is doing in the world.

Go to each of your young people and use the olive oil to anoint them as a mark of committing them to God. (Obviously, if anyone would rather opt out of this, let them do that.) Make small oil marks on their forehead, their feet and their eyelids, to pray for courage and to ask God to make them ready to go where he leads them and to see what he wants to show them.

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