

Redneck Christmas

Luke 2:1-20

Pastor Peter Hiatt

December 24, 2005

[The worship band plays...]

“My Heart Is Like A Manger”

Written and performed by Sydney Hostetler

My heart is like a manger laid
Where beasts of burden come to feed
A lowly vessel, roughly made
To serve another's need.

Always empty, never full

Without a hope of light

My heart is like a stable cold
And silent as the night.

My heart is like a crowded inn
With no more room inside the walls
Where only strangers dwell within
Like ghosts that roam its halls.

Never empty, always full

No comfort for those who might stay.

My heart is like a silent sky
I cannot find my way.

I had no expectations
No dream my life could mean more
Yet as my heart lay sleeping
A light within, a new life was born

My heart is like a manger full
Holding close, the newborn King
A stable made so beautiful
Where angels join to sing
Where peace and joy can come to rest
Where room is made for One

My heart is now a manger blessed
To hold God's only Son.

[There was a live nativity scene on stage for the Children's sermon. As the children were dismissed one of the shepherds stayed on stage. He took his robe off, walked to the center of the stage, and began speaking.]

Da'gum, ya'll look perty. Yer pastor said he wanted a livin' fertility scene er some such thing, and then he asked me to stick around and tell my story. My name is Larry, and I'm a shepherd. I ain't no genius so I brung some notes so I wouldn't forget nothin'. Yer fancy pants pastor probably doesn't need 'em, but I do.

Before we begin I knowed what some of youse is thinkin'. “Hey, you stupid towel head. Why'd you take your sheet off?” Well, that was for show. We wore sheets and towels alright, but that was only 'cause we didn't have access to fine apparel like this. [Larry is dressed in a pair of

jeans, a plaid shirt with the sleeves torn off, boots, and a baseball cap.] You can bet yer dog we woulda worn this. Even says “Levi” on the hind end.

See I’m a Jew from Bethlehem just south of Jerusalem. Some of my flocks supplied the “Levites” in the temple.

Just a second. I could use a dip. [Larry takes a round tobacco can out of his back pocket.] Now don’t worry, since I got religion I switched from Skoal to Folgers. I just keep it in this can for convenience sake. No need for high-tech coffee devices. Ya just put a pinch of Juan Valdez between yer cheek and gum. At first you get espresso. If you don’t like espresso just spit er out. After a few minutes ya got yerself a mellow yet full bodied French roast. I think I’ll have a latte [Larry pops some cream in his mouth.] or maybe a Mocha Frappuccino [Larry takes a bite of a chocolate bar.].

Now some of ya’ll may be a little bit perturbed. Yer thinkin’, “Da’gum, it’s Christmas Eve. I got dressed up an’ everything. And now I gotta listen to this redneck and watch ‘im spit. Da’gum, I been to the mall, and I seen the nertivity scenes. Them shepherd boys look nice and respectful and clean. Da’gum, this feller looks like he stinks. An’ it’s Christmas, for gosh sakes.”

Well daggone, if that’s you, maybe you don’t get the concept. Religious folks in my day didn’t get the concept neither.

Concept C = Concept Christmas.

To understand Concept C, you gotta understand Concept A and Concept B.

1) You might reckon Concept A to be right over here.

“A” stands for stuff like A+, Antiseptic, Angelic, and Alleluia Amen. “A” stands for hagian. In the Greek, that begins with “A,” and it means “holy.” God is Holy.

Now no one knew for sure what holy meant exceptin’ we was perty sure it didn’t mean sheep poop, spit, and sin.

It meant clean, and everything unclean was to be atoned for, made up for, and then the unclean thing disposed of “outside the camp.”

In my day Jerusalem was “the camp.” Inside of Jerusalem was the temple, and inside the temple was the Holy of Holies—Concept A, the Agnus Dei, the Glory of God.

Them priests and Levites that worked the temple had to constantly clean themselves—use perfume, take baths and such—and not just them but every good Jew. Some bathed three times a day (looked like da’gum prunes).

[Larry walks to the right side of the stage.] Well, think of Concept A right here—clean, holy, God, the temple.

2) And over here [Larry walks to the left side of the stage]: Concept B.

“B” stands for Bottom, Behind, Butt (I mean the conjunction, of course), Boogers, Burp, Bad gas, Barn (my barn). Concept B... my Barn.

Of course, it wasn’t my barn, it was *my* boss’ barn, and it wasn’t really a barn, but more like a stable or stall for animals, a shelter, and a manger.

It was full of sheep poop and spit. Not necessarily sin, but you see, the product of sin—dirt, decay, and death. It was just about as “outside the camp” as you could get.

You know, I seen some of these Christmas cards you get, and I went to the mall. I looked at every last nertivity scene. I didn’t see but one little sheep poo poo (turned out to be a pine cone). I don’t think you get the concept. Da’gum, you got a light-up manger. A manger is a feed bin. They’s full of boogers and spit and unclean excretia. You put a light in a manger, it’d scare all the sheep away.

Concept B is full of stink, and that's where a shepherd lives. Maybe that's where we all live. 'Cause you know you take the pertiest, fanciest lady here tonight, and you go set her out in a field. Come back in two, three days, and she'll stink.

It's like the stink is inside us just trying to get out.

Some of you sitting here right now look so perty, and you're just trying to hold the stink in...

"Lord, I apologize for calling these fine folk stinky." But da'gum you know yer only alive 'cause you got dead things rottin' inside you—dead plants and animals. We call it food on the way in and Concept B on the way out, and we's all tryin' to cover the stink.

That's what most religion is—Concept B covered in holy words and such. Like white washed tombs—perty on the outside, full o' stink on the inside. That's called hypocrisy.

Well, we shepherds weren't only stinkin' on the inside, we was stinkin' on the outside. We couldn't hide the stink.

Maybe yer here tonight, all nervous and scared 'cause yer losing a game of "Hide the Stink."

Maybe you been drinking yerself to sleep every night. Maybe you had an abortion.

Maybe yer cheatin' on yer wife or fixin' to leave yer husband.

Maybe you been thinkin' 'bout takin' yer own life 'cause yer losing a game of "Hide the Stink," and now yer in a room full of religious folks on Christmas Eve, feeling a million miles away from God and Christmas and such.

But I tell you what. You may be closer to Christmas than you think for in order to see Christmas (Concept C), you gotta be honest about Concept B. You gotta lose a game of "Hide the Stink."

Well, we shepherds lost at "Hide the Stink." Even though there was famous shepherds in the Bible, everybody looked down on us in Bethlehem. They could smell us in Bethlehem. We lost at "Hide the Stink." We were unclean.

You see Leviticus or somethin' says that if you touch a dead animal you didn't kill or get the wrong kind of spit or bodily "excretia" on you, you's unclean. We was, like, always unclean.

But the only way to get clean was to sacrifice a lamb. How's that for double bind? They needed us and wouldn't touch us.

They sacrificed lambs everyday in the temple. At Passover they'd sacrifice thousands... thousands. It was the way we got clean, not just from dirt and poop, but sin.

I didn't exactly understand it, but the lambs was like a gift to God or payment or somethin'. I figured we musta had a sick God and a sick religion.

We raised sheep for wool. Me and the boys would eat a lamb if we had to, but you gotta understand, dogs weren't pets in Israel (read yer Bible), lambs was. They were so innocent and fuzzy and cute. Why they'd learn yer voice, follow you around. That's how we'd shepherd our sheep. They knew our voices.

Well, the priests and the pastors (Did you know pastor means shepherd? Dudn't that beat all?), they didn't care for the sheep. The sheep didn't know their voice. That's why they had to build so many fences and walls.

King David said, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want." The Lord... a shepherd? That didn't make no sense to me. Shepherd... yeah, a shepherd who just led his sheep to the slaughter. See, I supplied the temple with sacrificial lambs, and it wasn't perty.

My connection was a feller they'd make High Priest in just a few years. You can read about him in yer Bible. The feller's name was "Annas."

Now, that's funny! I don't care who you are, that there is funny! That's Concept B dressed up like Concept A.

He'd always say, "It is pronounced Ānnas," and I'd say, "Yes sir, Mr. Anus." Git-r-done. Someone had to do it so get 'er done.

He didn't like me. See, he needed me, but he'd hardly talk to me. Didn't even know my last name. He called me "Larry the Sheep Guy" or "Redneck."

Redneck... Everyone makes fun of rednecks 'till their camel breaks down in the desert, or they need a lamb come Passover.

A Redneck... Abraham was a redneck (few branches in that family tree), a shepherd that married his half-sister, then pimped his wife to cover his tail.

Israel did the same.

Jacob means cheat, and he fathered all Israel 'cause his four wives and girlfriends had a cheatin' fertility contest. The whole bunch was constantly on the move. Da'gum, Israel practically invented the travel trailer. The entire country was like one crazy, gigantic trailer park. Even King David had been a shepherd boy in Bethlehem. The Bible is the history of God and the rednecks.

Of course, I didn't see that then. All 'cause the religion industry worked so hard at playin' "Hide the Stink."

Well, they was usin' me, and so they hated me, and so I hated me, and I hated everyone. I stunk on the outside, and I stunk on the inside. I knew I stunk. I was a piece of sh... Concept B.

And God? Well, He was over in Concept A, if there was a Concept A. And if there was a God, surely He didn't care about me. I had nothin' to give. Or worse, He **did** care about me—He hated me... good for nothin', redneck, Larry the Sheep Guy.

I covered my pain by makin' light of everything—a comedian. I had one friend, Harold. He covered his pain with just plain mean. He was like a stone. We called him... "the Herald."

"The Herald" wouldn't let anyone in, except maybe his lamb. Ain't that somethin? He had a lamby.

He was, like, one of those mass murdering psycho types with a pet kitten. You know, they're like that 'cause they been hurt so bad. Everyone's a threat, so they wrap their heart in stinkin' mean. Everyone's a threat except that da'gum kitten or lamby.

Well, come Passover time, I thought the Herald would just go psycho with rage on them priests and against God. "The Herald" said he didn't believe in God which meant he hated God. I s'pose I hated God, too. You hate God? You been hidin' that stink?

Well, I was depressed. I had an inferiority complex. Course, I wasn't very good at it. However, I was in therapy. I'd tell all my problems to Harold, and then he'd say, "Blow it off. It don't matter. There ain't no God, and you're a butthead."

Well, one night, along about 0 (A.D., B.C., not exactly sure), we was out abidin' in the fields. That's what was so great about them sheets. You was, like, wearin' you're sleepin' bag wherever you happened to abide.

Ya might ask, "Well what a ya fellers do when yer out there abidin' in the fields?" We wonder as we wander, of course.

So I says to the Herald, "I wonder as I wander out under the sky, if God gives a rip fer fellers like you and like I."

Harold said, "Shut up, Larry."

I said, “But we just poor lonely shepherds in fields where we lay... In fields where we lay keepin’ our sheep on a cold winter’s night that was so deep.”

Harold says, “We’re standin’ up, and it ain’t that cold, and it ain’t deep. How could a night be deep? Is that the only thing you could think of that rhymes with sheep? And why you keep rhyming everything anyways?”

And just then, BOOM! this huge glowing angel thing appeared overhead. I thought it was one of them alien abductions... aliens like us redneck fellers, ya know, but it was an angel.

It was realer than real.

I mean, it was more Concept A than I ever seen. BOOM... we hit the dirt. We was “sore afraid.” That’s what “sore afraid” means—so afraid yer sore. We were sore afraid.

But this angel named Lo (Lo, the Angel). Lo says to us, “Fear not!”

Yeah, right. I already had to change my sheets.

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that shall be to all people. For unto you (Larry the Sheep Guy) is born this day in the city of David, a savior who is Christ the Lord.”

And suddenly with the Angel there was a multitude of the heavenly host. (Now a “heavenly host” is not Bob Barker in a tuxedo at the pearly gates.) A heavenly host is an army, about twelve legions I figured.

Them bad boys had flamin’ swords and fire and alleluia amen. They was clean.

When I saw them I figured “This is it fer planet earth.” Judgment Day, D-day. I braced myself, and then I heard singing. They was singing, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

I looked over at the Herald, and he was just white as a sheet. I s’pose he was rethinkin’ that “Ain’t no God” statement. I said, “Hark, the Herald, angels ‘r singin’.” (You saw that one comin’ didn’t ya?). I apologize. I joke around not cause it’s so sad, but so da’gum glad. I thought I’d blow up. Glorious, holy, and strange.

Strange... I mean I felt like a kid playin’ on the beach come D-day. I look up. There’s the Allied Forces invading the Evil Empire (planet earth). An’ one of ‘em says, “Hey fellers, there’s Larry,” and they all come over. Twelve legions... and just sing me some songs, sayin’, “Don’t worry, Larry.” They sang to me—to me—no name, good for nothin’, redneck Larry.

I heard about a poor, lonely sheep herder in Montana. All he had was an out of tune fiddle and a battery powered radio. Used to love to listen to the Chicago symphony, and he wanted to play along. So he wrote a letter, and one evening thousands listened as they heard these words, “The orchestra will now play an A for a sheep herder in Montana.” They did, and that shepherd tuned his fiddle and played along.

I felt like the angels wanted me to sing along in tune with A... concept A. What was Concept A?

And one more puzzlin’ thing... where was the Lord of Hosts—Commander of God’s Army? Then it hit me, “Unto you is born this day, a savior who is Christ the Lord.” said Lo. That’s the Messiah. “And this will be a sign for you. You’ll find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lyin’ in a manger.” A manger!

Well, the angels sang, and then all at once they was gone. The Herald turned to me and said, “I think I was wrong about that God thing.” In a daze, Harold and me and the boys start walkin’ toward Bethlehem. “Christ the Lord.”

I figured a sign would be that He glowed or floated or somethin'. You figure that, too. You got them glowy babies in yer nertivity scenes. Ya sing, "Radiant beams from thy holy face."

If He glowed, Herod wouldn't 've had to kill all them babies. He coulda just said to his soldiers, "Boys, only kill the floatin' glowy ones."

The point is, He was born in a manger, and nobody woulda even seen him exceptin' the angels tipped us off.

Thousands were out and about that night, and none saw. None knew cause none would look into the stink that was my stable.

You see, the only manger between us and Bethlehem was in my stable. Most unclean place in all of Israel—the epicenter of Concept B. Boogers and spit surrounded by sheep poop and stink.

Now, we was rednecks, but even we fellers wouldn't even think of puttin' no baby in a feed bin in the stable.

I remember runnin' 'round the fence, and sure enough there was these two kids and the smell of blood, birth waters, and sweat. A pile of rags in the feed bin, and out of the rags, cryin' — just wailin'.

You sing that stupid song, "Little Lord Jesus, no cryin' he makes."

You try being born in a barn, stuck in a feed bin. You'd cry, too! And don't you see? That's the da'gum miracle:

That Christ the Lord would cry His tears in my manger.

That the Prince of Glory would choose to be born in my empty pain.

I stood there a second takin' it all in and then just exclaimed, "Sweet Mother of God..." and this sweet young gal looks up. She says, "Yes. I apologize sir, but there was no room at the inn." She was, like, a saint or somethin'.

They told us their story. The whole time I'm thinkin',

"This is the Messiah,
the Commander of God's Army,

this is the Holy One,
Alleluia Amen.

This is Concept A in the very heart of Concept B.

Religion, hypocrisy
was all Concept B hidin' in Concept A.

This was Concept A
born into the heart of Concept B,
makin' Concept C.

Concept A + Concept B = Concept C
Christmas.

And it was an invasion, a surprise attack, through my manger. God was invading planet earth with Concept A:

The Glory of God,
the Light,
the Truth,
the Life,

the Word,
the Fire.
And Concept A weren't just a "concept," but a person... born in my barn.

The Lord was a redneck, and a comedian.

- 'Cause this was funny. Not a sarcastic kind of funny like a joke coverin' up a world of pain...
- But funny in a deep laugh-yer-guts-out kinda way. Like a joke deeper than every drop of pain in this whole stinkin' world.

The Divine Comedy.

- Everybody was chasing power and glory, runnin' from my stable. Then the Prince of Glory is born in my manger.
- And the priests and scribes, they's all buildin' fences and walls to keep the holiness in and keep me out and then the Holy of Holies becomes my manger.

That's funny! I don't care who you are, that's funny!

And the joke's on you, but the joke is called grace, and if you could just laugh at yerself, He could be born in yer manger.

The joke's on you 'cause it's for you. He's wanting to surprise you with unspeakable joy.

That's what every good Daddy wants on Christmas. Ya set yer kid up for joy. Ya say, "I don't think we could afford the deluxe plastic action shepherd fun set." Then on Christmas mornin', Yahoo! you give 'em their greatest dream—the deluxe plastic action shepherd and the entire farm fun set.

And you know,
if the kids think they earned it,
you can't give it.
By definition, it ain't a gift no more—
it's payment.

Most folks don't give gifts
nor get gifts on Christmas.
They negotiate trade agreements.

That's what Annas and Caiaphas was doin'. I think that's why Jesus was born in my manger. 'Cause I knew I couldn't pay, and I couldn't Hide the Stink, so I got the gift.

So Concept A
was born into Concept B
which makes Concept C

Christmas.

Say it with me,
 “Concept A
 was born into Concept B
 which makes Concept C
 Christmas.”

Back to the story... I’m standin’ there wonderin’ as I’m wanderin’. The Herald just walks over and picks Him up... picks the Lord up. The Lord stopped cryin’, stopped cryin’ like He found His home in Herald’s arms. Herald started laughing and singin’—singin’ to Him, the Lord.

I ain’t never seen Harold remotely like this, exceptin’ perhaps when he used to hold his Lamby (his Lamb).

A shiver went down my spine, and I thought, “Good God, don’t let them priests get ahold of this Lamb.”

I buried that thought. We sat there for hours. Then the Herald went nuts. He really was “the herald.” He went runnin’ through the streets of Bethlehem, yellin’ about angels and God and the Messiah and sheep poop. And all the people came from their homes, gathered in the streets and said unto the Herald, “Shut up you stupid, drunk, redneck shepherd.”

Well, you know the story.

Herod...

descent into Egypt...

return to Nazareth...

Nazareth is a redneck town.

See, He was

a redneck from Nazareth,

born in a barn,

to an unwed, pregnant, teenage virgin.

That there’s about as redneck as you can get.

Fer the next 30 years, I continued to wonder as I wandered. I started going to Synagogue. Once I heard the Rabbi read the prophet Isaiah.

“Surely he has born our griefs and carried our sorrows...like a lamb that is led to the slaughter.”

Every Passover I’d get nervous, not ‘cause my lambs were being slain but ‘cause I couldn’t stop thinkin’ about Him.

Thirty years later He showed up around Bethlehem, and John the Baptizer says, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” (Just about scared the Concept B right out of me.)

For three years He preached. I was an old man then, but I followed Him like a little lamb. I knew His voice. He is the Good Shepherd.

Well, it was Passover when the false shepherds—Annas, Caiaphas, the priests and pastors—took Him, spilt His blood in the city, and then took Him outside the camp and had Him crucified.

I figured any second the twelve legions of angels would show—D-day, Judgment Day, at last. Well, the angels didn’t show. But actually it was D-day. It was Judgment.

Right before He died, He cried out, “Father forgive them,” and then it hit me like a board to the head...

Lamb of God,
 the Spotless Lamb,
 the Perfect Gift,
 Perfect Sacrifice,
 atonement to a God who seemed so cruel,
 but God was Jesus,
 and Jesus was this Lamb.

Jesus is the Love of God, poured out over the entire stinkin’ world.

Angels didn’t invade,
 ‘cause their Commander was invading with mercy—
 the very heart of Concept A.

So you see,
 the temple,
 the lambs,
 the prophecies,
 my empty pain,
 the whole stinkin’ world,
 even Concept B.

It’s all a set-up so we could receive
 Concept C
 Christ Jesus.
 Christ in me.
 Christmas in me.
 God in me.
 Concept A in me,
 like a living temple.

Now, He rose from the dead, and He makes all things new, including all them lambs. He rose, but I think the real miracle is that He descended, that He chose to be born in my manger
 my heart
 my hell
 my empty pain
 His redneck body
 Larry the sheep guy.

Even now Concept A is hiding in Concept B in the “last and least,” in “hobos” and “shepherds.” It’s Christmas all around ya, and it can be Christmas inside ya. ‘Cause He’s waitin’ fer you in your Concept B fer only there can you truly receive His Grace, fer only there are you truly poor in spirit and so only there can you believe the gift which is Himself.

So you been lookin’ for God? Where will you find him? (Last place you’d expect.) “Wrapped in swaddling clothes and lyin’ in yer manger.” So if you wanna find Him, you gotta stop playin’ Hide the Stink, that is confess your stink.

Are you mad at God?
Are you ashamed of yourself?

Maybe yer hidin' the stink in drugs or booze. Maybe you hide the stink in hypocrisy and lies.

Maybe in religion and good deeds.
Maybe you Hide the Stink in jokes or
maybe in just plain mean like Harold.

There's an old legend they tell in France about us shepherds that night. They say we all brought presents that night except one shepherd. (Truth is, none of us brought any presents... we didn't have any.) According to legend this one shepherd was named L'enchant (the enchanted one). And as we talked to Mary and Joseph, someone said, "Where's L'enchant?" We searched all around and finally found him under a blanket, hung over the manger.

There was L'enchant like a flame to the wind, they say, like a note that found its symphony. So L'enchant found his love. He stayed there all night whispering, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus," giving the gift the Lord wanted—wonder, gratitude for grace.

Well see, that part's true except his name wasn't L'enchant, it was Harold—no longer the mean one, the enchanted one... enchanted by grace.

So, stop playin' Hide the Stink.
Confess yer stinkin' manger.
And receive God's grace — Jesus.

Concept A in Concept B—Christmas.

[The worship band plays...]
O Little Town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light.
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary,
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is given!

So God imparts to human hearts
 The blessing of His heaven.
 No ear may hear His coming,
 But in this world of sin,
 Where meek souls will receive Him still,
 The dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem!
 Descend to us, we pray;
 Cast out our sin and enter in,
 Be born in us today.
 We hear the Christmas angels
 The great glad tidings tell;
 O come to us, abide with us,
 Our Lord Emmanuel!

And so, on that night that He was betrayed, at the Passover dinner, the Lamb of God took bread, and He broke it saying, “Take and eat.” And in the same manner after supper and having given thanks, He took the cup saying, “This is my blood of the covenant, drink of it all of you. My blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me.”

And so we invite you tonight to come forward, tear off a piece of the bread and dip it in the cup. All the cups are wine. There will be one cup that’s juice; the purple cup in this middle section. As you come forward, surrender your manger. You know we think that we have to clean up the manger before He comes, but that’s why He came... to clean it up. You can’t clean it up, and He’ll help you surrender it.

If you say, “Well, I don’t even know if I believe this stuff. I don’t know if I believe in God.”

Well, do you want to? ‘Cause you can even say this, “I believe. Help my unbelief.” Just like a mustard seed of faith, just calling out to him, “Lord Jesus, help me.” If that’s you, we invite you to come to the table and surrender your concept B, to concept A in order that it would be concept C—Christmas, Christ in you. And He will be born in you like a baby, and He’ll grow.

And so, in Jesus’ name, come to the table and give God the gift that He so earnestly desires... your manger, your worship, your gratitude and wonder over His relentless grace. In Jesus’ name believe the Gospel and worship.

[The congregation sings, “What Child Is This?”]

What child is this? The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And you see, this is what I think the Lord is saying to us, not just now, but with this entire fallen world, and all that we walk through and all of our concept B, and all of our struggles... I think He’s saying, “Merry Christmas. I’m giving you My heart, and don’t worry, I will give you all things with Him, but in this world of pain and struggle and loss, I’m showing you, I’m giving you My heart.”

And so, Merry Christmas. Believe the Gospel, walk in the Gospel by faith. He’ll grow in you. He’ll change you. He’ll transform you. He’ll make you into the very image of God until that

day we go to be with Him forever and ever and ever. And so, if you came to the table for the first time tonight, Merry Christmas. Jesus is born in you. He's born as a baby, and He will grow.

We have a prayer team in the back, and they will pray with you if you'd like someone to pray with, either about that or anything else. But by way of benediction, and by way of reminder...

Concept A was born into Concept B
which makes Concept C = Christmas

Merry Christmas, in Jesus' name, amen.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (*And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.*) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Luke 2:1-20 (KJV)

By visiting the shepherds, the angel revealed the grace of God toward mankind. Shepherds were really outcasts in Israel. Their work not only made them ceremonially unclean, but it kept them away from the temple for weeks at a time so that they could not be made clean. God does not call the rich and mighty; He calls the poor and the lowly.

Warren Wiersbe, Bible Exposition Commentary

In a Rabbinic list of thieving and cheating occupations we find that of the shepherd. This classification of herds as notorious robbers and cheats means that like the publicans and tax-gatherers they were deprived of civil rights, i.e., they could not fulfill a judicial office or be admitted in court as witnesses. . . . It is worth noting that to buy wool, milk, or a kid from a shepherd was forbidden on the assumption that it would be stolen property. The Rabbis ask with amazement how, in view of the despicable nature of shepherds ["No position in the world is so despised as that of shepherd." Midrash, Psalms 23], one is to explain the fact that God is called "my shepherd" in Psalm 23:1

Jo'ach'im Jeremiah, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.
 He leads me beside still waters.
 He restores my soul.
 He leads me in paths of righteousness
 for his name's sake.

Psalms 23:1-3 (ESV)

The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him.

2 Samuel 12:2-3 (ESV)

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. . . . I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. . . . And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

Ezekiel 34:7-13, 34:15-16, 34:23-24 (ESV)

Back when the sacred authors used the imagery of the shepherd to depict Jesus, they had a clear understanding of the job description. A shepherd is needed only when there are no fences. He is someone who stays with his sheep at all cost, guiding, protecting, and walking with them through the fields. He's not just a person who raises sheep. Though our bishops consider themselves "tenders of the flock," most are nothing more than mutton farmers. They build fence after fence, keeping the flock within sight so they don't have to dirty their feet plodding through the open fields. After all, the landowner frowns upon dirty feet.

Lena Wolter

A party of tourists was on its way to Palestine and its guide was describing some of the quaint customs of the East. "Now," said he, "you are accustomed to seeing the shepherd following his sheep through the English lanes and byways. Out in the East, however, things are different, for the shepherd always leads the way, going on before the flock. And the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." The party reached Palestine, and, to the amusement of the tourists, almost the first sight to meet their eyes was that of a flock of sheep being driven along by a man. The guide was astonished and immediately made it his business to accost the shepherd. "How is it that you are driving these sheep?" he asked. "I have always been told that the Eastern shepherd leads his sheep." "You are quite right, sir," replied the man. "The shepherd does lead his sheep. But you see, I'm not the shepherd, but the butcher."

Church of God Evangel

"My anger is hot against the shepherds. . . ." Thus said the LORD my God: "Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. Those who buy them slaughter them and go unpunished, and those who sell them say, 'Blessed be the LORD, I have become rich,' and their own shepherds have no pity on them. . . ." Then the LORD said to me, "Take once more the equipment of a foolish shepherd. . . ." "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. . . . "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me," declares the LORD of hosts. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."

Zechariah 10:3, 11:4-5, 11:15, 12:10, 13:7a (ESV)

Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’”

Matthew 26:31 (ESV)

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

John 10:14-16 (ESV)

It is a wonderful thing that the story should tell that the first announcement of God came to some shepherds. Shepherds were despised by the orthodox good people of the day. They were quite unable to keep the details of the ceremonial law; they could not observe all the meticulous hand-washings and rules and regulations. Their flocks made far too constant demands on them; and so the orthodox looked down on them. It was to simple men of the fields that God’s message first came.

William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke

If anyone touches an unclean thing, whether a carcass of an unclean wild animal or a carcass of unclean livestock or a carcass of unclean swarming things, and it is hidden from him and he has become unclean, and he realizes his guilt; or if he touches human uncleanness, of whatever sort the uncleanness may be with which one becomes unclean, and it is hidden from him, when he comes to know it, and realizes his guilt; or if anyone utters with his lips a rash oath to do evil or to do good, any sort of rash oath that people swear, and it is hidden from him, when he comes to know it, and he realizes his guilt in any of these; when he realizes his guilt in any of these and confesses the sin he has committed, he shall bring to the LORD as his compensation for the sin that he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat, for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin. . . . You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean. . . . Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst.

Leviticus 5:2-6, 10:10, 15:31 (ESV)

But these were in all likelihood very special shepherds. We have already seen how in the Temple, morning and evening, an unblemished lamb was offered as a sacrifice to God. To see that the supply of perfect offerings was always available the Temple authorities had their own private sheep flocks: and we know that these flocks were pastured near Bethlehem. It is most likely that these shepherds were in charge of the flocks from which the Temple offerings were chosen. It is a lovely thought that the shepherds who looked after the Temple lambs were the first to see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

John 1:29 (ESV)

Surely he has borne our griefs
 and carried our sorrows;
 yet we esteemed him stricken,
 smitten by God, and afflicted.
 But he was wounded for our transgressions;
 he was crushed for our iniquities;
 upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
 and with his stripes we are healed.
 All we like sheep have gone astray;
 we have turned every one to his own way;
 and the LORD has laid on him
 the iniquity of us all.
 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,

yet he opened not his mouth;
 like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
 and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
 so he opened not his mouth.

Isaiah 53:4-7 (ESV)

God wasn't attracted to you and didn't choose you because you were big and important—the fact is, there was almost nothing to you.

Deuteronomy 7:7 (The Message)

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 (ESV)

While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to have the baby, and she gave birth to her first son. Because there were no rooms left in the inn, she wrapped the baby with pieces of cloth and laid him in a box where animals are fed. . . . So the shepherds went quickly and found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in a feeding box. When they had seen him, they told what the angels had said about this child. Everyone was amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Luke 2:6-7, 2:16-18 (NCV)

And here in dust and dirt, Oh here,
 The lilies of his love appear.

George Herbert

You shall have a place outside the camp, and you shall go out to it. And you shall have a trowel with your tools, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig a hole with it and turn back and cover up your excrement. Because the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and to give up your enemies before you, therefore your camp must be holy, so that he may not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you.

Deuteronomy 23:12-14 (ESV)

We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.

Hebrews 13:10-13 (ESV)