

Luke 2:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Analysis

Shepherds 'abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night' receive the first angelic announcement of Christ's birth. God's choice of shepherds—among society's lowest classes—to receive heaven's greatest news demonstrates divine inversion of worldly values. The phrase 'keeping watch' (Greek 'phylassontes phylakas,' φυλάσσοντες φυλακάς) means guarding vigilantly, suggesting spiritual alertness. These shepherds faithfully fulfill humble duties while remaining spiritually receptive, making them fitting first witnesses to the Good Shepherd's birth.

Historical Context

Shepherds ranked low in Jewish social hierarchy—ceremonially unclean due to constant contact with animals, unable to observe Sabbath and purity laws strictly, often suspected of theft and dishonesty. Their testimony was inadmissible in court. Yet David was a shepherd when anointed king, and God called Himself Israel's shepherd (Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34). The fields near Bethlehem may have been where temple lambs were raised—sacrificial lambs for Jerusalem's temple possibly watched by these shepherds who first witnessed the Lamb of God who takes away the world's sin.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What does God's choice of shepherds as first witnesses to Christ's birth teach about the gospel's reach and heaven's values?
2. How does the shepherds' faithful watching in humble circumstances model spiritual receptivity to divine revelation?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ποιμένες ἦσαν ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τῇ αὐτῶν
And shepherds there were in country the same
G2532 G4166 G2258 G1722 G3588 G5561 G3588 G846

ἀγρανλοῦντες καὶ φυλάσσοντες φυλακὰς τῆς νυκτὸς ἐπὶ¹
abiding in the field And keeping watch by night over
G63 G2532 G5442 G5438 G3588 G3571 G1909

τὴν ποίμνην αὐτῶν
G3588 flock the same
G4167 G846

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