Beyond Just Seeing

LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church
December 31, 2025 – New Year's Eve
Chad Boorsma
Luke 2:8-20

Ho-hum. It's a phrase we might hear from the lips of people to indicate weariness or a lack of engagement. It might also be used to describe something dull, tedious, or perhaps a bit too routine. "How's your job going?" we ask our next-door neighbor. "Ho-hum," is his reply. "How was your vacation? What's it like in school these days? How are things in your retirement years?" "Ho-hum" we may hear, or if not those actual words, we may get a reply that indicates a similar sentiment.

If news reporters had gone to the fields outside Bethlehem the night Jesus was born to interview the shepherds and to ask them how things were going, they, too, may have heard something similar to "ho-hum." The shepherds are out there night after night, seeing and guarding the sheep that were likely not their own but the property of someone else, sheep that were probably used for animal sacrifices in Jerusalem. Their eyes are on the lookout for an occasional thief or wild animal or perhaps a wandering sheep, but most of the shepherd's time is just spent sitting around watching the flock.

Adding to this "ho-hum" attitude may be the fact that the shepherds appear to have no way to encounter the Living God and to see him at work. Rabbis, who consider the shepherds unclean, ban them from participating in religious activities in the temple. From the mundane tasks of their job to the way they are viewed and treated by others, to the lack of spiritual experiences available in their life, the "ho-hum" attitude of perhaps many shepherds is almost to be expected.

Unfortunately, we, too, sometimes possess that same outlook not only in life and in our jobs but also in our spiritual walk. Devotions, prayer time, and worship may be things we do, but like watching over sheep, we may not pay much attention to the way God can work through them. As one believer noted, while reflecting on her life, "When I was young, I read my devotional because I felt like it was something I had to do to be a Christian. As I got older, I realized I was often just going through the motions, almost like checking a box off my to-do list. I wasn't paying any attention to what the Spirit was trying to teach me."

For others, as the busyness of life starts to overtake us, we may skip some of those spiritual activities, and perhaps if we become too busy, we stop doing them altogether – activities that would help renew us, draw us closer to him, and empower us to see the amazing things he has been and continues to do today.

Expect the unexpected, as they say, for renewal comes in a mighty way that night just outside Bethlehem. The shepherd's "ho-hum" evening is suddenly broken when an angel appears in the sky and the glory of the Lord shines all around them. "I bring you good news (I bring you the gospel)," the angel says, "that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior, yes – the Messiah, the Lord – has been born today in Bethlehem." The angel then gives them instructions, as we see in verse 12, on how they can find the baby.

And if that weren't enough to revive the souls of those Shepherds, God sends an entire angelic choir to lift up his name in praise: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

These keepers of the flock, these shepherds, have the privilege that night to hear God's amazing message and now, with a fire burning in their hearts, they look at each other and say, "Let's go! Let's get over to Bethlehem. We have got to *see* this – this event that the Lord has told us about.

In the Greek language, there are two words that can be used for the verb "to see." There's *blepo*, which means to see with the eyes, to see things at face value without necessarily involving the mind nor the heart. Then there's the word *horao*, which means to see with the mind, to perceive, to know. It is to see beyond just seeing and to understand something more deeply than just what is on the surface. We might say that it involves spiritual perception.

This is the word that Luke uses in verse 15 to describe what the shepherds are doing this night – when they decide to go and see what has happened. On the surface, the scene the shepherds come upon in the manger is anything but wonderful. To the physical eyes, it is a lowly place filled with lowly people: Joseph, the carpenter; Mary, the ordinary mother from Nazareth; and Jesus, the newborn son laying in a feeding trough. But at this moment, as one author so appropriately expressed, "The extraordinary radiates beneath the ordinary."

When the shepherds look at the face of Jesus as he lies there in that feeding trough, they are seeing light illuminate the darkness. The Messiah, the one for whom the world has been waiting, the one to redeem his people from their sins, is right before them, and they are seeing beyond just seeing.

And what they see is so wonderful that Luke uses this verb form two more times in this passage. In verse 17, we read that when they had seen him, the Christ, they spread the word concerning what they had been told. In other words, they are so filled with wonder at what they see that they cannot keep it to themselves. They share the story, and all who hear it, as verse 18 tells us, are astonished, including Mary, who treasures up all these things and ponders them, keeps them, in her heart.

The wonder of the shepherds also leads them to worship, to praise God. Verse 20 tells us that the shepherds return from Bethlehem, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and *seen*, which were just as they had been told. At that time in history, worship was confined to the temple, but here God bursts out of those walls to commune with those on the margins. What the shepherds *horao*, what they see, leads to awe-filled praise.

The word for "amazed" in verse 18 (*thaumazō*) can also be translated as "to be astonished, to wonder at, to admire, or to marvel at." As we reflect back on the year for us that is nearly done, were there times when we were so filled with wonder after seeing something that we couldn't keep it to ourselves? Were there times when we were so amazed by God that we couldn't stop praising him?

For example, when we see a sunrise, do we just see that big ball of light appearing on the horizon, or do we see a magnificent display of reds, oranges, and yellows perhaps intermingled with a scattering of clouds, a display that leads us to proclaim, as did the Psalmist, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands"?

When we read God's Word, do we just see words on a page, or do we see the amazing things he has done in the past and hear the ways he continues to speak to us today?

When we see a newborn, do we just see a baby, or do we behold the miracle of new life? When we witness people declaring table fellowship or making their profession of faith, do we just see a church ritual, or do we see people being led by God's Spirit to take the next step in their walk with Jesus? When we hear about the death of a fellow church member – 44 of them this year – do we just see it as them taking their last breath on earth, or do we see it as them taking their first breath with the Savior, an experience so wonderful that it far surpasses words?

And as we approach the table tonight, do we see the Lord's Supper just as eating a piece of bread dipped in juice, or do we see it as a time of renewal, a place where we are spiritually fed, a place where we receive God's grace?

New Year's Eve is an occasion not only for looking back, but also for looking forward to the year that lies ahead. As we journey through 2026, let me encourage you – and myself as well -- to keep our eyes open, as well as our minds and our hearts engaged by watching all the ways that God is renewing us by the moving of his Spirit. With him there is no "ho-hum" for he is able to do far beyond what we can think or imagine, and when we see his amazing deeds, let us share the wonder with others, and give him the glory. In the name of the triune God -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – Amen. ©Chad Boorsma