

**Luke 2:11**

On Christmas Eve it's common to talk about sheep, cattle, and donkeys. These are all manger scene animals. But tonight I want to talk about a cat. To be more specific, a nursing home cat. Last week as we caroled for our shut-ins, there was a cat in one of the rooms; and when we began singing, it perked up and listened. For a number of carols it listened, watching us; and then, without making a noise, it left. It walked right out the door to another room.

It's not that the cat was upset with us. I don't think our singing irritated it. The Christmas carols simply did nothing for it. It was a spectator for a while. It listened and watched, but that's all. It was not a participant. There was no understanding, no faith on the part of the cat. Of course not...God does not work on the hearts of cats.

Tonight you are not here as a cat. You are not mere spectators; you are participants. These children are going to tell the Christmas message, and you are involved, because Jesus came not for cats—He came for you. Perhaps you, like that cat, are curious about how well the children will perform. Perhaps you, too, will perk up to listen and watch them say their parts and sing their songs. But when you walk out that door later on, you can leave not as a cat, but with understanding and faith in Christ, because God is at work here tonight; He is here to bring to you the Christ-Child.

Through the words you hear, the story of Christ's birth becomes not just a nice story told by children—it's your story; the story of your salvation; of the birth of Him who came down from heaven to suffer and die for you. "For you," the angel told the shepherds; "For unto you is born a Savior, Christ the Lord!" Tonight you are not cats...you are shepherds; and these children are angels; and their message is for you.

We may see that cat again next Christmas. It may show up again to watch and listen. But what about you? God worked on the hearts of the shepherds. They rejoiced in their Savior. They became witnesses for Christ. They were drawn, were they not, to worship and hear—to hear and worship, over and over, for the rest of their lives—because they were, after all, not cats but shepherds.

You, friend, are not a cat. Don't act like one. You are a shepherd. You are one for whom Jesus was born. You are one to whom the message is given. You are one for whom Jesus died and rose again. You are one whom God has declared forgiven for Jesus' sake. That's why you can live not as a cat, but as a shepherd. You can live for Him who lived and died for you. You can proclaim Christ by how you live. You can come, over and over, to worship and hear...to hear and worship. You can live in faith—faith in Christ whose birth we celebrate tonight. Amen.