Good morning, I, Grantley have the joy of sharing with you this morning. As we draw closer to Christmas, my thoughts naturally turn back to that very first Christmas, and to the birth of our Saviour.

We read in the second chapter of Luke about the shepherds:

> *"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."*

That means pretty much everyone in Bethlehem and the surrounding area heard the news spreading on the grapevine. Now, Bethlehem was a mere eight to ten kilometres south of Jerusalem—a simple two-to-three-hour walk. And its proximity to Jerusalem was crucial for the Temple economy, because the shepherds in those fields often raised sheep specifically destined for the daily sacrifices at the Temple.

So here is the question: Why did not one religious leader walk down to Bethlehem to investigate?

The nation was desperate for a Saviour. They had been told He would come from Bethlehem. And now, the news is floating in the air—yet no one seems to care. Why? Well, shepherds weren't exactly high on the social ladder. In fact, they were often viewed as untrustworthy, thieves, and liars because their flocks would sometimes wander onto neighbouring farmers' crops—sometimes by accident, and sometimes not!

Fast forward forty days. When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice: *"a pair of doves or two young pigeons."*

Now that isn't what the law asked for. Leviticus 12 says the mother should bring a *lamb* as a burnt offering, and a dove as a sin offering. The *only*

exception was if the family was too poor to afford a lamb—then, and only then, could they bring two doves or pigeons.

Just imagine how painful that must have been for Joseph and Mary. Here is their firstborn, the child of promise, the Saviour of the world… and they can't even afford a lamb. You can picture it: they are wearing cheap, shabby clothes, negotiating to buy a couple of doves, and asking where to find the right priest to dedicate their baby. And the moment they speak, everyone can hear that they aren't locals—they carry that unmistakable, backwater Galilean accent. Just like Peter's accent gave him away years later around a campfire to a servant girl.

Then, reading further in Luke, we meet Simeon:

> *"Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him… that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah."*

Moved by the Spirit, Simeon enters the temple courts just as Mary and Joseph arrive. He takes the baby in his arms and praises God, declaring Him a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel. The parents marvel at his words. Then Simeon blesses them but looks at Mary and warns her that a sword will pierce her own soul too.

Right beside him is Anna—a prophet, deeply devoted, fasting and praying day and night. She comes up at that very moment, giving thanks to God and speaking about the child to everyone looking for redemption.

Into this very ordinary, almost drab scene walks Simeon, boldly proclaiming that this poor little infant of peasant parents is the Messiah. How did Simeon and Anna recognize Him? Verse 27 gives us the key: "Moved by the Spirit, Simeon went into the temple courts."

What was hidden in plain sight from the sophisticated Pharisees and Sadducees was revealed, past all the confusing outward layers, to Simeon and Anna.

It seems God specializes in beauty that is badly wrapped:

- The King of kings sleeping in a feeding trough.
- The greatest gift to mankind entering the temple as the baby of a pauper family from the backwaters.
- A young shepherd boy slaying a massive giant.
- Gideon with just 300 men wiping out the mighty Midianites.
- And unlearned fishermen leading a movement that would eventually find root in every nation on the planet.

We see this same pattern today. Think of the OM Ships ministry. Standing our old ship next to the luxury cruise liners visiting the same ports is like comparing an old VW Beetle to a brand-new Ferrari. And yet, visitors would consistently talk about experiencing a peace they had never felt before. When our rust-bucket ship, the *Logos II*, left the port of Tripoli, Libya, there was a crowd of about 200 people standing on the dock, weeping because they had touched something they couldn't quite fathom.

I'm reminded of a reporter who watched Mother Teresa working amid the squalor and desperation of one of the world's worst slums. He remarked that he wouldn't do what she was doing for a million dollars. Her response? "Neither would I."

Somehow, in that human hellhole, Mother Teresa felt she was touching Jesus. What pushed the reporter away was precisely what drew her in—she saw an irresistible beauty where everyone else just saw filth.

We see this beautifully captured in Revelation chapter 5, where John is told, *"See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah... has triumphed."* But when John looks, what does he see? Not a roaring lion, but a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne. The boldest proclamation of triumph, embodied in the most unassuming form.

So how did Simeon see the Saviour when all the learned Pharisees saw was just another poor baby? The text tells us: he was *moved by the Spirit*, and then he saw.

The question for us today is simple: Are we stuck looking only with our physical eyes, or are we open to being moved by the Spirit?

Let us pray:

Father, forgive us for the times we only look with our physical eyes. Help us to be moved by Your Holy Spirit so that we can see beyond the bad wrapping and see what You see. Help us to be moved by Your compassion, and to love the way You love. This coming season, help us to be a blessing instead of just expecting to be blessed. May Your kingdom come, and Your will be done right here where You have placed us, so that those around us might catch a small glimpse of heaven. Amen.

Have a wonderful day