



“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”

—Luke 2:8-10

Shepherds held a special, but difficult place in Israel's society at this time.

On one hand they were an important part of the economy, and their flocks a source of food for the community. On the other hand, shepherds had to manage births, feeding, sickness, injury and death so were often considered unclean according to Jewish purity laws. On top of that they spent most of their time moving from place to place to find pasture for their sheep, and safe places to rest from external threats such as weather, thieves, and predators. This kept them on the edges of the community. Unable to take part in many of the festivals and religious rituals they were considered outsiders. Stigmatised. Isolated. Unclean.

The story in Luke goes on to show the shepherds making their way to Bethlehem to welcome and worship Jesus. Here we see the other side to shepherds as depicted in the bible, a symbol of Godly leadership and care (see Psalm 23 for

example).

The nativity brings together these two sides of what it means to be a shepherd and reminds us of what God intends to do through His son. Repeatedly Jesus reveals himself to the marginalised, drawing them into the centre where they can experience God's transformation. The shepherds are filled with joy as they bear witness to this great event unfolding before them. They leave inspired, with new purpose, and life, 'glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen.' (v20)

We see this transformation continuing today. Charles' life has echoes of the shepherd's experience. Charles, a young man full of promise, quietly served his community in Timor-Leste with passion—teaching language and computer skills, volunteering with youth, and supporting local livelihoods through horticulture.





Leprosy targets the nerves in the hands and feet, causing loss of sensation and movement. This can lead to fingers bending and clawing, making them more difficult to move.

But when he began experiencing the symptoms of leprosy, everything changed. What followed was a long season of fear, isolation, and shame. Even though he sought treatment, Charles felt abandoned—by the healthcare system, by society, even by his own family.

Like the shepherds, Charles became an outsider—not because of wrongdoing, but because of a condition that others didn't understand. His illness made people afraid of him, and that fear led to distance. He described how even his parents separated his plate at meals. The rejection was subtle at times, but deeply painful. He felt unclean, unwanted, and unseen.

And yet, just like the shepherds on that dark night outside Bethlehem, Charles was not forgotten by God.

Through the intervention of Misaun Lepira Timor-Leste (ML-TL), Charles began to receive not just medical help, but also emotional and spiritual care. People came alongside him, just as the angel came to the shepherds, bringing a message of hope: “Do not be afraid.” With support, Charles regained not just his health, but his dignity and hope. He found his voice again, speaking out to encourage others not to give up, and urging them to seek help and healing.

This is the heart of the Gospel. God draws near to the forgotten. God brings healing, purpose, and joy to those on the margins. The shepherds, once considered outsiders, were the first to proclaim the arrival of the Messiah. Charles, once silenced by shame and illness, now speaks out to lift others up. Both became messengers of good news.

As we reflect on the birth of Jesus, may we be reminded that God continues to work through the

humble, the hurting, and the hidden. And may we be challenged to see and include those whom society overlooks—whether shepherds in a field or young men like Charles affected by leprosy. Because in God's kingdom, no one is too far, too unclean, or too broken to be part of the story.

Yours in Prayer,



Glen Coleman
Community Engagement
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Leprosy Mission Australia



Will you pray with us?

Your prayers for people like Charles are part of God's transformation. Together we bring people in from the margins and create more inclusive communities. Please continue to pray for the healing and restoration of people like Charles so that the Good News of Jesus birth will continue to shine brightly in the world.

Add your prayers for people like Charles by emailing engage@leprosymission.org.au or use the enclosed form.

Would you like to do more?

There are more people in Timor-Leste like Charles who need transformation. Your kind-hearted gift towards the E-LETRA (Ending Leprosy Transmission in Oecusse-Ambeno) project can restore people, bringing healing, purpose, and full lives.

<https://www.leprosymission.org.au/projects/e-letra/ppd06>

