

Shepherding Our Children

by Rev. Prescott A. Rogers

The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church describes the spiritual meaning of the term “shepherds”. These statements indicate why shepherds were the first people summoned to greet the infant Lord. “A *shepherd*...is one who teaches and leads to the good of charity” (*Arcana Coelestia* 4713). “A *shepherd* is one who leads to the good of charity through the truth of faith...” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6426). “*The shepherd and his flock*...are those who teach and who learn” (*Apocalypse Explained* 863:8).

In a supreme way there is only one Shepherd, the Lord. It is He who teaches the truths of faith in His Word and who, by them, leads to the good of charity. We humans are the ones who learn from His Word. But the Lord is also an example to all of us, for we too may teach others those same truths of faith from the Lord’s Word and encourage them to live the life of charity. As parents we are privileged because we have the opportunity, and the responsibility, to do just what “shepherds” are meant to do for our children, the “sheep.”

But if we are to be good shepherds, we need to possess and to exhibit those qualities displayed by the shepherds—qualities that were essential reasons why they were called to the stable in Bethlehem on that most special of days. Jesus was not born to royalty in a palace, but to a woman married to a carpenter from a relatively insignificant town, and He was born in a stable. A stable is a place for mild animals to be fed and to sleep. It provides them protection from inclement weather and from wild predators. The shepherds, who tended similar animals and provided them with food and protection, exhibited the same qualities as did Mary and Joseph. These qualities are humility and tenderness.

When we parent and educate the children entrusted to our care in the truths of faith, and so help inspire them to be charitable, and when we do this with humility and with tenderness, we are truly “shepherds.” And we are then following the Lord’s example to us all.