

CHRISTMAS DAY 11.30 BCP Eucharist  
Sermon by Canon Chris Humphries  
Reading: Luke 2 v8-20

Here's an interesting Christmas reading I found. (Dave Hopwood "Adrenalin")

*"Three jobs I would not like:*

*One:*

*The weather man in the time of Moses.*

*Its bad enough having to say: "well, there's a squall on the way over the Atlantic and that'll be followed by a blizzard and two weeks of flooding."*

*In Egypt it would have been....*

*"Well there's a fine afternoon ahead, followed by a light rain in the evening and a blustery plague of frogs in the morning. Then there'll be a heavy drizzle of gnats, followed by a gusty storm of flies. There'll be a torrent of hail the size of footballs and the worst storm in history. That'll clear up later in the day to make way for the locusts. Oh and don't bother buying any sun cream because it'll be eternal night for a few weeks. Have a nice day".*

*Two:*

*A travel agent in Palestine at the time of the first Christmas.*

*"Yes Mr Smith I know you booked in advance but due to unforeseen circumstances we have no accommodation available whatsoever... what circumstances? Well, to be precise – Caesar issuing a decree for the entire Roman Empire, we couldn't have known here at Getaway Breaks could we? I know there's not a free hotel in Bethlehem, Mr Smith, that's mainly because everyone in the known world is sleeping here tonight. Would you like to postpone or have a later break somewhere else? Well how about Easter time in Jerusalem, I'm told there's not much going on there at this time of year...?"*

*Three:*

*The person to sort out the mess on planet earth.*

*For that you'd need brains, wit, courage, zeal, infinite patience, and the willingness to be born in a stable, live in poverty, surrender all security and carry the burden of the planet's problems on your shoulders. Not a job description for the faint-hearted. In fact, there's only one person I can think of who could apply....."*

Yes, coming to earth to save humankind was no cushy number, no straightforward task for the Son of God.

But someone had to break through the tangled web of sin and self-centeredness that too easily cuts us off from our Father God, so Jesus came, Christ was born in Bethlehem.

And today's Gospel reading tells us what happened next. The Shepherds shocked and amazed by the appearance of an angel host announcing the birth of the Saviour.

Of all the characters in the Christmas story I can relate most easily to the Shepherds.

Their reaction is so human and down to earth, yet enthusiastic and wholehearted.

Let's look at the details more closely.

FIRST

God's messenger met the shepherds where they were. They weren't with the religious leaders and the orthodox folk at the temple in Jerusalem, they were doing what Shepherds do – looking after their sheep in the fields. Other people looked down their noses at shepherds, not good Jews, not regular at worship, too many commitments with their flocks. But God seems to love to surprise us. He does things his own way. He speaks how and when he likes and he chooses whom he will. Who does he choose today? Who does he call? Who is doing his work? One thing is certain. There will be many surprises when we get to heaven.

God's values and priorities are a huge contrast to the way the world is today. Like the shepherds we need to meet God where we are, at home, at work, at Church, wherever. He is never limited to particular places or circumstances.

## SECOND

Hear the message. Perhaps the shepherds didn't have much choice on this one, what with the night sky gloriously ringing with Angel voices. But they listened and, simple as they were, took the message on board. It's a vital stage in how we relate to God – to expect him to have a message for us in the first place – what little ole me?! and then to listen and absorb what he's telling us.

It happened to plenty of folk in the Bible. Moses, Samuel, Ruth, Isaiah, Mary, Zaccheus, Matthew, Paul – in very different ways God had a word for them and a calling. And his message for us is just as much tailor-made, personalised. Each of us is unique to God, special, and gently, but insistently, he invites every one of us to respond and welcome him into our hearts.

NEXT comes the concern of the angels for the shepherds “Don't be afraid”. Yes encountering the Living God can be alarming and overwhelming. We will feel out of our depth. And we are! But God, remember our loving Father God, provides all we need. So we don't have to be fearful.

I love the shepherd's instant reaction. “Let's go” they don't hang around discussing theories of angel appearances, theories of angel appearances, the theological implications of the message they've heard, or even the wisdom of leaving their sheep – they're off! A saviour is born. Right let's go and see!

A sad aspect of our sophisticated 21<sup>st</sup> century society is its critical and cynical tone. Give me some of the shepherd's undiluted enthusiasm. God speaks? God has a job for me? Right, let's go. Let's get stuck in. What would more of that attitude do for the vigour of our faith and the health of the Christian Church.

When the shepherds had seen Mary and Joseph and the babe – they were bursting to tell others. “Hey guess what we've just seen!” and all who heard it wondered – well it didn't fit their mind-set. Messiah in a manger – common shepherds the first ones to visit? – Naah.

And so what became of the shepherds? All we know is they returned to the fields – well, the sheep still needed caring for – and that they praised and glorified God. Yes we still have much to learn from the shepherds, so let the word of God touch you, the arrival of the Son of God enthuse you, and the worship of God give you glimpses of the glory which one day will fill all things.

