

SHEPHERDS

Sermon for Christmas Eve – Lk 2:1-20

LPC, 12/24/13

Aren't we all shepherds tonight?

But seriously, looking around this evening I don't really see anyone who resembles the shepherds in this Nativity. There are no sheepskins lashed over shoulders with leather thongs, no dish-towel-like headdresses, no staves or crooks. And so far as I can tell no one smells too gamey. However allow me to point out some points of identification between us and the shepherds around Jesus' manger.

First of all, we've all come here tonight because we got some kind of message. About a half-hour to an hour ago, we were all saying to each other, "Let us go now and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." Or something like that, even if it was more like, "Jeez, look at the time! We better get to church so we get a seat!"

Many of us are as curious and excited tonight as the shepherds were. We also, like the shepherds, know that we're not here because of our status in life. We are like the shepherds in that we know there's no earthly reason for the almighty God to single us out for a revelation of good news and great joy.

I daresay that none of us has been waited on by choirs of angels so often that we expect such a thing to happen to us. We know we're nothing special about us, at least nothing to attract God's special attention.

But tonight we hear, "Ah yes, dear ones, you are special. You are especially loved by God. And therefore of all people God wants you to know of the most wonderful thing that God has ever done. Tonight, with the shepherds, we hear angel choirs. Tonight, the very sky above our heads breaks open with the music of the spheres. Can you not hear it?"

Now of course, attracting God's attention may not be we want in our heart of hearts. At the very least, it's not *normal* for God to send us messages. What the dickens is going on? Plus, there's always the chance that God may not be entirely happy about what we've been up to lately. Holy Hannah! We could be in deep ... trouble!

But tonight we hear, "Don't be afraid. There's good news. God has sent you and savior, and what's more, you can check this out for yourself!"

Most of us are not close to the earth as shepherds are, dealing with the life-and-death struggles of pregnant ewes and vulnerable lambs and beasts of prey stalking the creatures in our care. But we are as earthbound as the shepherds. As a matter of fact, in our post-enlightenment culture, we don't believe anything that can't be proved, or

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recreated under laboratory conditions. Furthermore, in this so-called post-Christian age, we no longer even think in metaphysical terms.

In many ways we are *more* earthbound than any previous generation. We are not versed in heavenly language. We are unaccustomed to considering morality in cosmic terms. We are independent, even isolated from each other. The forces at work in the world we assume are random.

But tonight we are joined to the highest heaven, sharing in an event so stupendous it will change forever all of creation. When God takes on human flesh, heaven and earth are firmly joined, and can never again be sundered.

Like the shepherds, we have come away from our regular routines in search of *something*, haven't we?

Those of us who have contributed to the planning of this service, from me, to the musicians, to the people who climbed tall ladders to string those garlands, to those who made sure our external lighting was functional, to those who set the holy table and counted out candles, all of us were laboring toward a common end. At some level we were all hoping that our efforts would contribute toward your finding Mary and Joseph and the Child lying in a manger tonight.

If my testimony counts for anything, let me assure you – they're here! Mary and Joseph and the Child! Not only represented her in plaster, but here, and here, and here.

The angels were right.

We are all shepherds tonight. We have come up this hill in the dark of night looking for something we've been told to look for. And it's here! It's not uniquely here of course: the same miracle is occurring all over town, all over the world. God-with-us is indeed with us.

Now conceivably there are people here tonight who are not "feeling the magic." That's OK. God's presence is not dependent on human feelings. Whether you "feel it" or not, God is here, and will leave this place with you this evening, never again to part from you.

Some of us will leave here tonight glorifying and praising God for all we have heard and seen. Some of us will instead be left to ponder in our hearts, unsure of what exactly we have seen and heard. Some of us may even wonder whether anything special happened here at all.

So be it. Christ has come among us, never again to leave. That truth is not dependent upon individual frames of mind. Thank God. If you are sad tonight, may God comfort you. If you are merry tonight, may God protect you. Either way, God is God. And we are *all* seekers. We are all shepherds.