

**Ahh...the shepherds...
the poor, dirty, scummy shepherds....**

**Who in their right mind would want to be one?
They weren't respected,
they weren't admired...
they certainly weren't the cream of the crop ...
you your son to be one
and you absolutely wouldn't want your daughter to marry one**

**So, why in the world does the Angel announce the birth of the Messiah to *them*???
Why in the world do *they* get a special angelic experience
and get a chance to see the newborn babe that the Jews had long desired?**

**Why wouldn't God send the angels to the folks who show up in the temple each week
and pay their taxes on time
and follow all those rules and 613 commandments all the time?**

Why????

Well...good question!

But an even better question is: why not?

**By asking all those questions either out loud or in our hearts
gives us a clue that we still think of God loving only the good, well deserving folks...
or if not only loving the good people, at least loving them more
than the not so good people....**

But that is *SO* not the God of Jesus..

This afternoon I'd like to reflect a bit upon the shepherds in a slightly different way than how we usually do.

Usually we speak of the shepherds as a metaphor for all those folks who feel unworthy and left out... but this afternoon I'd like to move the metaphor to all of those parts of ourselves that we feel are unworthy, all those parts of our selves that we know aren't so great... those parts that we like to hide and don't want to admit are there... and perhaps even all those ugly parts that we don't even know exist...yet.

Instead of pondering the outcasts of our society, I'd like to ponder the outcast parts of ourselves...

Because we all have them... We all have thoughts that we are not proud of... we all have done things we wish no one knew about, we all have said things we would like to take back...

The Shepherds in today's reading can represent all of those pieces of us andwhen we listen to the story from this perspective the story offers us HOPE, great hope and peace and joy and great, great, great gratitude.....

Allow me to explain what I mean...

You don't have to say anything out loud, but think about one habit, one thought, one action that you are not especially proud of.... one that you would like to get rid of, or let go of....

Bring it fully into your awareness...

Now: here the angel say to you:

Do not be afraid!

I am bringing you good news of great joy...

to YOU is born this day in the city of David a Savior,

who is the Messiah, the Lord...

Yes to you, for you...

God has arrived as a tiny baby boy for you...

Because, to be plain and simple...

because God loves you, no matter what or who you are...

Now...possibly we are saying to ourselves:

do you know who you are talking to?

do you know that I have this habit which isn't very nice,

do you know the things I've done and

the things I've said?

Do you know about all of this STUFF???

Cuz if you did, you certainly wouldn't be telling me to

go and see this newborn Messiah...

If you did, you wouldn't be announcing this magnificent event to me...

you'd find someone a lot nicer, a lot kinder, a lot more generous....

Yes, yes, yes....the angel would say,

but you still don't get it!

God knows all about that stuff...

of course, God would like if you were kinder and more forgiving...

and yet God has sent me to announce to you this wondrous event

and to tell you to get going...

hurry up! run as fast as you can...

**don't worry about anything...
just do it!**

**of course, the question is: do we go?
do we accept the invitation and go visit the babe or
do we find ourselves frozen with feelings of guilt and/or unworthiness?**

**The invitation to the shepherds is ours...
The invitation this Christmas season is ours...
we are invited to see God made flesh in us...
we are invited to witness the miracle of Holy Love made human in us...
we are invited to let go of whatever is holding us back from fully accepting God's love,
be lies or jealousy or resentments or *whatever* we might be ashamed of...
and we are invited to witness the miracle of love being born once again inside of us!!...**

**If we accept the invitation,
if we open our lives and our hearts to the Presence of this amazing
Divine Love we will find that it heals or, perhaps melts is a better word,
whatever it is that we struggle with....
We will find ourselves more peaceful and more grateful...**

Because Love is the most powerful force in the Universe.

**Teilhard de Chardin once said:
"Love is the only force that makes things one without destroying them...
Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity,
we shall harness for God the energies of love.
And then, for the second time in the history of the world,
man will discover fire"**

**2,000+ years ago this kind of love was born in and through a tiny baby,
and announced to shepherds keeping watch....**

**This kind has rarely been understood much less lived in and lived out...
but each and every day we are given another chance to try it again...
to try to let Love love us, all of us,
the good and the ugly parts of us,
the nice and the not so nice parts of us...
the honest and the not so honest parts of us....**

**Each and every day, we have another opportunity to run towards
the love that will grow our souls
and heal our hearts.**

**Each and every day we have another opportunity
to run towards the Love that will grace our lives
with joy ...**

**Each and every day we have another opportunity
to run towards that Love that is already inside of us
that will bless our world with peace...**

**Each and every day we have another opportunity
to hear the angels announce to us:**

**Do not be afraid! I am bringing you good news of great joy...
to YOU is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord...
and when we do, when we hear those words spoken to us...
we will fall on our knees and whisper, Thank You. Amen**