

The Journey and Joy of the Shepherds

Luke 2: 15 - 21

Happy First Sunday of Christmas, as we journey with the shepherds and share their joy.

I love today's bible reading, so familiar to us, and I'm sure we have heard it many times, over the years.

I've often been told that I sing my theology and 'while shepherds are watching their flocks by night', we hear the old familiar carols and the bells of Christmas that tell us the 'old old' story.

I'm wondering, if you were asked, who would you most identify with, in the Christmas Story narrated by Luke?

In the 'Ignatian Tradition', you are often asked to imagine yourself in the scene, to use your senses, to be moved by the account:

I close my eyes and imagine:

I am one of the shepherds, I always seemed to be an ordinary shepherd in the school nativity play, so it's easy for me to imagine, it would be much more challenging for me to be the Innkeeper or a Wise Man or Mary. However, in our society, few of us know the reality of being a shepherd.

This year, we had a few days in Exmoor, staying at The Lazy Sheep Barn, and, I got more of an idea, this was the view from the window! and the hot tub!!! OK Maybe... not such a realistic impression!

But I found myself contemplating on the sheep and the shepherds and of course the shepherdess!

The air is clear and cold, I see the faint movement of the sheep in the distance, and the night sounds of a rural world.

It's a 'Silent Night', my gaze turns toward the night sky and there are bright stars in the heavens.

We were staying in the protected, International dark sky reserve, I could watch the glory of the stars, the vast, floating universe stretching out over the fields... **stretching out over me.**

In this landscape famed for its woodland, wildlife and ancient churches, on a clear night you can see up to 3,000 stars with the naked eye, in stark contrast to less than 200 stars in a city environment.

I try to imagine, that suddenly the sky erupts with light and singing. It is frightening, confusing, and I shield myself. What could this be? There are voices and brightness beyond imagining, sounds I've never heard, and after some moments the sky goes dark again, the stars reappear, but..... nothing will ever be the same.

The shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place". (Luke 2:15)

I find myself thinking:

- ✚ How would I react?
- ✚ What is the angel saying to me?
- ✚ What do I want to say to Jesus?

Maybe we can find ourselves in those shepherds. We do not know their names, but we do know, there is nothing more powerful than the name of Jesus, who they went to see.

Luke tells us 'When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed'. (Luke 2: 17)

Their role was to spread the word// **That's our role too.**

They talked to everyone: they talked about the child: not Mary or Joseph or their encounter with the angels, or the heavenly choir they just shared what they had been told about Jesus.

Today, this becomes our role and our story.

God takes ordinary people, like shepherds, ordinary people like us.

In the words of Godfrey Rust:

Grant us a shepherd's joy

**heaven breaking through
when least expected
into our ordinary lives.**

Ordinary people are called, to share the extraordinary message.

Mary was changed as she treasured up these things in her heart. The shepherds were changed. We are changed.

How can we not be filled with joy?

It was probably a typical night in the field, then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, the angel said

“Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy, that will be for **all people**.

Their joy was centred on the baby, who had been born in the City of David, and the joy was meant for all.

Come, all ye faithful, **joyful** and triumphant, O come, O come to Bethlehem.

(share a poem by Joyce Rupp)

Keeping Watch in the Night

shepherds keeping watch in the night,
terrified by a voice
not heard before,
not supposed to be there

shepherds
keeping watch in the night,
alarmed by powerful light
up ending their security

but they did not run away

they stayed in the dark
and listened
stretched their ears
to unknown voice

and the voice said:
“do not be afraid.
stay in this dark place and listen.

I have wonderful news:
the Hoped- For- One,
the Birthing you’ve longed for
in the depths of your soul,
has come, oh yes, has come”!

Perhaps today, we might speak a little less and contemplate a little more on
the Christ Child’s coming.

Perhaps today we will bow with the shepherds, and alongside Mary hold Christ
in our hearts.

And today:

May we rejoice in God’s presence among us.

May we experience the **Joy** in the Christmas Story, by immersing ourselves in it

May we pass on the love, that has been given to us, ignited countless times by
others, who have knelt in Bethlehem’s light.

Andmay you sing, at the top of your voice, along with me,

Joy to the world! The Lord is come

Here is Good News