

God Speaks to the Shepherds

Christmas Eve

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The traditional nine lessons and carols service begins with the words:

BELOVED in Christ, at this Christmas-tide let it be our care and delight to hear again the message of the angels, and in heart and mind to go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, and the babe lying in a manger. Therefore let us read and mark in Holy Scripture the tale of the loving purposes of God from the first days of our disobedience until the glorious Redemption brought us by this Holy Child.

At Christmas time, in fact the whole reason to celebrate Christmas is about hearing again the story of the Nativity and to celebrate again God's gift for his world. It is a message of light coming to darkness, salvation to those who are condemned, life to those who are perishing. Today, I would like to think particularly about the shepherds out in the fields. The night was dark, and then suddenly the light burst in. There was the bright and wonderful star that appeared, and the angel, and then the choir of the heavenly host.

Now I don't know about you, but I think that if I faced that series of events, God would certainly have obtained my attention. Even me, thick as I am, would have guessed that something important was happening - even before the angel spoke these words:

"Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

Let alone when suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"*

This was one of those moments in history when God interrupts - he breaks through into our human existence and something special happens. In fact this is the whole message of Christmas: God has intervened in history. He has come to dwell with us.

The shepherds were the ones to whom this message was announced. They were no one special, in fact, they might be said to be less than ordinary. They were not the scholars, nor the religious elite or the ruling classes; not even tradesmen. The shepherds were the working men and women of that time. It is no accident that God spoke to them first, for the message of Christmas is for all humanity and not exclusive to any group. But let us ponder their response!! *When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.* These simple

working men and women were so influenced by this event that they responded immediately. They went to find out more. To confirm their experience, and then, they told others the news.

This is the response that God asks of us all. As we come to understand that he has broken into history, we are called to respond to this news, and then to share it with others. Now maybe God does not hit us with stars or angel messages or angelic host, but if we give him our attention for just a moment, he will draw us to his Son, that we might share in the promised salvation.

Take a moment now, in the stillness of this place and see past the busyness and the confusion of Christmas and contemplate the meaning of this child's birth..

May the Lord bless you and your families, and may your Christmas be happy and holy, and may the blessed babe of Bethlehem touch your heart and your life.

AMEN