

Sermon, Christmas Day,

Brookton, Beverley, York, Quairading, 24th and 25th December, 2023

Let us celebrate with the shepherds, those wonderful simple shepherds. The shepherds are brilliant. On hearing the angel's message, they simply said to one another *"Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."* And that's exactly what they did. You might say a brilliant example of taking God seriously. They went to Bethlehem, saw the miracle of God-with-us, the Baby in the manger, retold God's message and went home glorifying and praising God. Today we're with them. Today, we too are simple humble people who are taking God seriously. We too want to see this thing which God has done.

What did the shepherds go to see? What did they expect to find? What do you expect to find? Is it a king reclining in his bed surrounded by servants and wealth so that even the greatest and most powerful of people would feel small and insignificant? Are you expecting to find some kind of no-nonsense leader who will straighten out the world with strong-arm tactics? No! We know quite well that they went to Bethlehem expecting to find a Baby wrapped in bands of cloth. Isn't it incredible how the King of Kings and Lord of Lords has arranged things so that the weakest of people, the least and most insignificant of people, can approach him without fear? In Jesus God has become small, a servant, in order to be near us and to help us. That's something which can fill us with joy and praise.

It is not necessarily easy to grasp the wonder of it all: our God in the form of humble human flesh. Isn't that what we seek with the shepherds? We come following the Good News we've heard to find God where He has promised to make Himself available in a way that we can approach without fear. Isn't it so that we react as the shepherds did?

Who isn't filled with joy and praise over being well received by the God of Heaven and Earth? Aren't we rightly filled with joy and praise when we find that we can get right up close to our Lord Jesus Christ without fear? This is a tremendous thing, and the shepherds show us that it's available to all. The shepherds take God seriously and show us that no one is too small or too insignificant to approach the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Our dear God has seen

to that. Therefore, we celebrate and sing songs of praise to our fantastic, imaginative, creative God together with the shepherds.

Today we really have gone with the shepherds to see what God has done. We also go to Bethlehem. I don't mean that we travel to Israel, although some do that and benefit from it. No, mostly we don't go to some shrine where Jesus is said to have been born, although I'm sure that there is a certain benefit in that. No, I mean that we go to 'Bethlehem', to the 'house of bread' where Jesus truly is to be found. We gather as church, as we have this day, to receive the bread broken and given, to receive His body and blood, given for us. This house is truly 'Bethlehem' for us. Jesus is here and we may approach Him according to His promise, just as the angels' message to the shepherds said that they would find Jesus in Bethlehem.

We are like the shepherds because we find Jesus here, just as the messengers have told us. Albeit that the messengers who speak to us are quite different than those who went to the shepherds, the message is much the same. "Good News. God has sent you a Saviour. He is Jesus Christ. You'll find Him there among His people gathered for worship, hidden in the assembly and His Word and Sacraments." We come and find Him here; Jesus, our Saviour, God with us.

Christmas is about our amazing God who made Himself weak and small to come to us and help us. However, no one can know this if they're not told. Therefore, we need to be like the angels and the shepherds. We can be like the angels for all the people of the world who don't know where to look for God. Like the angels, we know where Jesus Christ can be found. We can point the way to Him. We can tell people what to look for and for what to listen. We have a message of Good News for all people. The Saviour has come, He's here. We can tell people that Christ the Lord is wherever Christians gather to hear His Word, where there is the forgiveness of sins, Baptism and Holy Communion.

True, Jesus might be hard to spot in worship, but He wasn't exactly obvious in Bethlehem either, wrapped in a towel and lying in a feed trough. The important thing is that we know where people can meet God and that we let people know. We're God's messengers of the Good News, like the angels.

We're also like the shepherds. We take seriously the invitation of the angels to meet Christ the Lord. We're confident that although God doesn't appear to us the way which we might think God should appear, He is here for us. We marvel over the very high regard Jesus shows for each of us, becoming weak and small, so that He can come near to each one of us, no matter how weak or small or unworthy we are.

The shepherds were rightly terrified when they saw the awesome glory of God reflected by the angels. Yet when they come to God Himself, the baby Jesus lying in the manger, there's nothing fearful there. He's come for their good, to save them. He's come for our good, to save us. Thus He clothes Himself in ways which protect us, and which make Him difficult to recognise at first.

Yet, once we realize that we're meeting the living God, like the shepherds our joy knows no bounds. Then the world can glimpse God through the way we live. We sing and we talk of this amazing thing God has done. God has come to us as one of us. Only a heart of stone can be unmoved by such a profound realisation. We no longer need to fear God's anger or God's absence because Jesus Christ has become a brother to us, as unworthy as we are.

Praise be to God, who gives us more than we can ask and does more than we can imagine. A Saviour has been born to us; He is Christ the Lord!