

Midnight Mass

Isaiah 9: 2-7

Luke 2: 1-14

In speaking and listening may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Once again this year, part of the preparations for Christmas have involved listening out for what we need to know about gatherings, about keeping each other safe, and deciding what our celebrations are going to be like. Our messengers are the scientists, the politicians and the journalists who offer various ways of making sense of what is going on around us. Many of us, have perhaps learnt to limit our listening – to avoid too much anxiety, too much gloom.

Tonight though, we are being invited to step into the light of messengers of a different kind: the angels who were God's messengers over two thousand years ago.

We can imagine that life on the hillside as a shepherd was pretty tough, cold at night, with the need for someone to be alert and awake to protect the flocks from marauding predators, a dark and uncertain job, with its own anxiety. It was certainly not a respected job either – shepherds were often set apart from respectable company. However romantic our Christmas card images are, this was raw and rough work which tested strength and resilience.

Into that darkness, exhaustion and tension, something totally unexpected and even more confounding:

An angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,^[b] praising God and saying,

¹⁴ 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'^[c]

Do not be afraid

Good news

Joy for all people

Glory to God

Peace

The age old message that rings through the story of Christmas told throughout our generations – through centuries of poverty, or plague, of wealth, of war, of depressions, pandemics and calm times too, through centuries of every kind of human experience, every fear, every struggle, every uncertainty.

Do not be afraid

Here is good news

Here is joy for all people

Here is the glory of God

Here is the peace you crave

Every generation wants to hear that reassurance for one reason or another.

In our own way each of us shares with the shepherds the struggles which the angels interrupt.

The shepherds let that light blaze into the darkness of their night, they let the joyful songs fill their souls. They let these messengers

from God overcome their fear, soothe their exhaustion and bring them a new hope, a new hope that overcomes too their isolation from others – “Let’s go to Bethlehem” they encourage one another.

Let’s allow this news to draw us into the greater light of the tiny child who has come to bring healing, salvation, hope to our world.

And they hurry to share in the joy, the peace, the glory that is offered to a weary world, in the stable, in the gathering around a small baby.

And their story tells us that by the time they left, they left full of joy, full of peace, full of news of the glory they wanted to share.

Tonight we stepped out of the darkness of the night into the gentleness of the lighted church. We each share with the shepherds a year of challenge and uncertainty, but we are invited to hear the message of the angels spoken to us, the message of God given by angels, and made real in the birth of God with us, Jesus:

Do not be afraid, here is joy, here is glory, here is peace.

Let us allow the words of the carols, the scriptures, the image of the stable, the light of candles and twinkly lights – let’s allow this heart of Christmas to touch and renew our own hearts, our world weary hearts, the hearts which have known grief, and are care worn.

If the tough resilient shepherds can find their love, hope and peace in the baby in the manger, can’t we let him touch us with light and love and joy this night?

It’s my prayer that in your celebration of Christmas this year you may know the peace and hope the Jesus came to bring, that in our celebrations we may be renewed to live through the coming year with the love and kindness that is God’s gift of peace, and that we may become, like the angels and shepherds of old, the

messengers of good news for each other and those around us,
that the world needs at this time.

A Happy and blessed Christmas to you and all those you love and
have concern for this night. Amen