

Christmas Day Homily 2023

Isaiah 9:2,6-7

Luke 2:8-20

The Shepherds.

Did anyone get any unusual presents today??

I ask because our readings talk about lots of rather unusual things...

We have just heard about a great light shining on people in deep darkness- that a CHILD Had been born who has authority on his shoulders, who is the wonderful counsellor – that means extremely WISE
A child who is MIGHTY GOD??!! – everlasting father and a Prince of peace?

What a lot of confusing images!

How can a child have big enough shoulders for great authority

And how can a baby have wonderful wisdom?

I don't get it!!

Then In our gospel reading we are introduced to Shepherds.

Shepherds on a hillside, out of town, working at night looking after their sheep.

These Shepherds had a reputation for being coarse, antisocial and rather smelly – yet The Angel of the Lord appeared to them! And not only ONE angel – a MULTITUDE or a BATTALION of angels!

WHAT? The MIGHTY GOD sent HIS chief angel to appear before some smelly nightworkers in an unfashionable part of the country? The wonderfully wise God allows an army of his heavenly host to join in? Is THIS HIS wonderful wisdom?

It sounds a bit bonkers to me...

If you have an important message what about telling the important people, those with influence who can tell the world – the Roman equivalent of the BBC Home service, or Hello magazine perhaps...

But to tell a few Shepherds?

But hang on, let's think a bit more. Shepherds were quite important in biblical times. The scriptures mention them quite often and not least in the psalm 23 – The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want – which was written by another famous shepherd who then became a king – King David. So this shepherd became a king...

And didn't Jesus say when he was grown up that He was the shepherd of the sheep – so this King became a shepherd....

It seems then that the concept of shepherds were quite important and fundamental.

Is that the point then? Is this what God wants us to understand on this special day in these particular readings?

That God is interested and reveals himself in the ordinary and unexpected?

Christmas is anything but ordinary in today's world. It is full of sparkle and colour when many people's lives are anything but.

We clean and decorate our homes, sweeping aside and hiding away anything of the mundane and every day, to make the place look extraordinary

We travel to different places, or we entertain large numbers of people who eat specially prepared food, and we give and receive new and particular gifts – none of this is ordinary.

But then what happened on the first Christmas day was not ordinary so we are right to do special things as we remember it.

But let's be careful we don't forget a very important truth as we enjoy the shimmer and sparkle. Where do we really need to hear the news of Christmas? When do we need to hear the God is With us and came to bring justice and peace?

We need to hear this message most when we are struggling, sad, worried, not sure what to do or where to turn. When our worlds are upside down and in chaos and devastation. That is where we need to hear about Christ Mass – God is with us

SO this is when we can remember that the birth of the baby who is God, who will bring peace and justice, love and wisdom, was announced first to ordinary people. To people who worked night duty, who were carers, who knew darkness, who lived out of town, and were on the margins of society, yet did a vital job.

Christ's birth was revealed to shepherds first, indicating that Christmas IS IN and FOR the ordinary, the everyday, and the mundane. The vital and the unnoticed.

These ARE the important people, the ones in whom and for whom heaven is revealed and where the love of God is demonstrated.

God has come to be with us in Jesus Christ, has come in and for the ordinary and everyday. So we can see the ordinary in a new way.

He comes for those times we don't feel worthy, for the times we have no energy of our own, he comes like light in the darkness, changing our surroundings so we can see and have hope.

In the weeks coming up to today the message has been - Wake UP, pay attention!

And now, God is still saying to us –I want you to wake up and notice, to SEE and to be interested – to look at the ordinary in a new way; to see ME there, to make ME known in the everyday. We are to be like the shepherds, ordinary people who go to the manger and meet Christ in the barn, and then go out into the world, the ordinary everyday world, glorifying and praising God for all we have seen, just as it has been told us.

May you have an extraordinary Christmas, and when everyday life returns may you still see God, and his Christ, in the ordinary, and honour the people you find there.