



The Shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them (Luke 2:20)

The shepherds see God and return to normality. Summoned by a vision that was life-transforming and life-giving, they leave their sheep and make their way into the crowded, narrow streets of Bethlehem, where in the most unlikely of places, they find the cause of the universe shifting in its course.

And then they return, and presumably go back to the life they had led as shepherds.

Of all the mysteries of the incarnation, its simplicity is the one that is born in/on me afresh each year. In its simplicity is its power and its challenge to us in these times of war and suffering, of multitudes on desolate roads seeking refuge. Caught between the Devil and the Sea, the desperate and hungry, make their way through unimaginable peril. Palestine was very much like that. It was not a place of safety, but of danger, and like those millions today, Jesus himself was carried by anxious parents to the safety of another land.

In memorable words at the Inauguration of the General Synod of the Church of England, the Preacher to the Papal Household, Father Raniero Cantalamessa said: "In many parts of the world, people are killed and churches burned not because they are Catholic, or Anglican, or Pentecostal, but because they are Christians. In their eyes, we are already one! Let us be one also in our eyes and in the eyes of God."

Amidst the terrors of Paris, of Bujumbura, of Iraq and Syria, and amidst the fear which we so often allow to dominate, we are called back to the simplicity of the Incarnation. Jesus identified himself completely with the poorest and the most broken of the Earth. Those who are lost in our world today seek the simplicity and beauty of that gift, which as we identify together unites us in adoration of the God who gave his only son.

The Irish poet Michael O'Siadhail, in a poem called 'A Toast on the Eve', writes:

"Where is the star that beckons to the east,

That God come down to bless the flesh

Of living? O give us the daily yeast

To burble through the veins and charm

Our sour grapes into wine. Find me the crèche

Where a god is cradled by a woman's arm."

I pray that in our common endeavour to establish peace, to encourage the fearful, to comfort the traumatised, to love the poor and in them to

find afresh the Christ-child born in poverty, that we may all be gripped again by the simplicity of the action of God which has brought us a church, suffering, yes, but full of hope and strength in the gift of the Spirit.

At this Christmas I pray for you and your churches, and seek your prayers for me and the Anglican Communion.

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby

Archbishop of Canterbury

Christmas 2015

3 min read

Source URL: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/archbishop-justins-ecumenical-christmas-greeting>