



Baa Humbug

Luke 2:1-20

Facts about sheep

The thing about keeping sheep is that wherever you go in the world, it's not very profitable. You keep sheep where you can't keep anything else - in mountainous areas or bad agricultural land. Sheep farmers are usually amongst poorest farmers. So shepherds - the people who actually look after the sheep are people who don't have the most important job. In fact, in Bible times, it was exactly the same.

Yet it was to these most ordinary of people that God chose to reveal a message to. You heard the familiar story this morning. Of shepherds out in the fields, guarding their flocks from thieves and wild animals. Maybe sitting around a camp-fire chatting, or just asleep.

Suddenly the silent night isn't silent any more - they're surrounded by angels praising God. Wow. They were having an encounter with angels and it was everything they would have expected of angels I guess.

All that was in aid of giving them an encounter with God. But what they encountered in Bethlehem wasn't God on a huge throne or anything like that - it was a baby in a manger, covered with strips of cloth - a borrowed space, in a borrowed cot amongst the animals - hey - rather than the Promised One being amongst the rich people that ran the country, He was brought into a world that they knew - amongst the livestock, in ordinary-ness.

That was the life Jesus lived - an ordinary one. It only got to be extraordinary in the last few years of His life and ordinary people identified with Him and saw Him as their champion. And He also died like so many of them - a victim of injustice and intolerance.

What was God playing at? Surely He had the power to appear in a puff of smoke and say "look at Me, I've arrived! Now I'm going to sort all you dodgy people out." Instead, he let cruel people take Him and put Him to death on the cross.

Why? Because God loves ordinary people. People like you and me, that by our nature are separated from Him. I don't need to tell anyone that. If God isn't a natural part of your life, then you are aware of that gap. We are separated by our own lives and needs which we don't see that God could, would or should be a part of. God calls anything we do or are that keeps us separate from Him by a word Christians called sin. Sin offends God. You know how it is, when we offend someone - they don't speak to us. There's a rift, a gap and it isn't healed until someone does something about it. In many ways, offending God is worse than that. It's rather like breaking the law. Offend against the law and it brings a penalty - a price.

God didn't want things to be like that wanted to open a way by which He could know us if we want to know Him - so He made the first move to heal that rift between us and Him. So He became a human being and lived our life. And He suffered all the things that we suffer. Never say God doesn't understand how I feel - because He does - He's been there too.

And the end was the most awful death anybody had devised - death on a cross. That was the penalty, the price that had to be paid so that God to forgive us and invite us to make Him part of our lives.

Jesus rose from the dead and like the shepherds, He invites us to have an encounter with Him this morning. Not as a baby, but as someone who was and still is an ordinary person like ourselves, but is also the extraordinary person who can change our lives because He is God after all.

And encounter with Jesus changed the shepherds' lives – He can change your life and my life too. What sort of change do you want to see in your life right now? Maybe things are just terrible at home and you need some hope and encouragement; maybe your health worries you; maybe it's financial problems; maybe you need freedom from addiction or a compulsive lifestyle. Jesus came to make a difference and He wants to start that change in your life this morning.

Most of all He wants each of us to understand that to do that He needs to be part of our lives in a real way, a dynamic way. He wants us to realise we are separated from God, why we are separated; recognise that He has died for us, ask God to forgive us and welcome us into His family – and watch the change. God is opening the door and putting out the welcome mat and red carpet and inviting us in this morning. The question is, are we going to take Him up on His offer.

Perhaps you're just thinking – baa humbug to what you think is a load of religious twaddle. Then ask any Christian and they'll tell you the same – Jesus changes lives! If you need life to be different then don't leave it to fate or good luck – ask God to make that change.

So make this Christmas a truly merry one by accepting Jesus into your lives. Bring all your doubts and problems to Him. Let Him make the difference.

Maybe you're listening to this and you once believed all this and followed it but now Jesus doesn't play much part in your life. Maybe you don't feel He's relevant to what you want to be or to do. I have known lots of people like that. It seems a good idea when life is sweet – but what happens when it goes sour? Who do you rely on then. Yourself, your partner, the DSS, the NHS?

I believe that God is inviting you particularly this morning to start looking in His direction. He's not saying "you've had your chance, push off. The welcome mat and red carpet are also rolled out in your direction. He wants to welcome you home and be all that hope and encouragement that you are missing. He readily brings forgiveness and hope to anyone – yes, anyone – who asks Him and wants to follow Jesus.

Come and be prayed for. Accept Christ.