

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then 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: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah,[a] the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' 13 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]

It would not necessarily have been assumed that shepherds would be among “those whom he favours”. After all, shepherds were typically poor and rough, St Luke himself tells us they were living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And night and day that’s where they were to be found right enough, protecting their charges from predators of one sort or another, leading them from time to time to fresh pasture, but always on the edge of any community except their own, out of sight and out of mind. And yet it was to the shepherds, unkempt and unknown though they were, that the angel of the Lord appeared; it was around the shepherds, unrecognised and unacknowledged though they were, that the glory of the Lord shone. To **you** is born this day, the angel told them, this will be a sign for **you**. And so it was to and for shepherds that the good news of great joy first came.

If this last year has taught us anything it is surely to appreciate more and to take for granted less those whose efforts might otherwise have been overlooked. Those who work night and day not just on the frontline in hospitals and care homes, but behind the scenes, out of sight and out of mind; and those who have kept the supermarket shelves stocked, and the bins emptied, and the post collected and delivered. The police officers and ambulance crews and teachers and so many others who have gone about their tasks, but with extra risks attached. This Christmas Eve we give thanks for them all and just when we need some good news, we welcome anew the good news of great joy for all the people, that first came to the shepherds living in the fields.

Eternal God, this holy night is radiant with the brilliance of your one true light. Grant that we who have known the revelation of that light on earth may come to see the splendour of your heavenly glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.