

Third Sunday ~ the Candle of the Angels and Shepherds

We light this candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.



Music for the third week in Advent

- Carol: Hark the herald angels sing! Glory to the newborn king!
- Taize: The kingdom of God is justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit
Come Lord and open in us the gates of your kingdom
- Handel's Messiah: Chorus –Glory to God
Duet – He shall feed his flock like a shepherd

Our wreath has three candles alight now – the prophets', the parents', and now ordinary people are drawn in ...

Our meditations in the first week had a social justice theme, in the second week we were more personal and intimate. This week we consider how those two might resonate together in worship and contemplation. The glory of the Holy comes directly to the humblest, and the response is presence, witness, and adoration.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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: to you is born this day in the City of David, a Saviour who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace and goodwill among all people!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them.

Imagine the scenes – first these ordinary people living outdoors night after night with their animals when suddenly a messenger turns up with the strangest of news and joined by a starry choir ... and then these ordinary people finding a couple from out of town, camping with a newborn in a barn ... Let yourself be one of these ordinary people, a youngster, a granddad, a simple lass, ...

When the angel appears, how would you express the fear, astonishment, total amazement in your body? Stand now, move around and take up this posture.

Or if you would rather, imagine yourself arriving at the fodder box, and seeing the small face of a snugly-wrapped baby ... what would your body's response be?

Allow yourself to enter into the worship, the wonder, the silence as you hold this stance or posture with your body for several minutes. Be present to the events; let your spirit experience the privilege and the mystery. Stay in the sacred space.

After the time of stillness has come to its end, you may like to write a simple psalm, or a message in a birthday card, or sketch the scene in charcoal or pastels, to give witness to your own adoration, and wonder. You could leave this response beside the Advent wreath.

Glory to God in the highest and peace and goodwill to all people on earth. AMEN

Today is Day Two in the third week of Advent

We light this third candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.

Our reading is the same passage as yesterday, and today we learn from Mary's response to the events.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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: to you is born this day in the City of David, a Saviour who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace and goodwill among all people!"

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"Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart". Is this something I too might do? Prayer that is treasuring and pondering, prayer in my heart ... contemplative prayer.

Choose a word of 1 or 2 syllables from this reading that you are drawn to – perhaps something the angels said ... great joy, savior, good news, glory, a child, peace... and sitting erect but comfortably, with eyes closed, breathe normally, saying the sacred word as you breathe in and out.

Relax into this, and trust the Spirit to guide you into God's presence.

After 5-10 minutes, open your eyes, and stay still for while longer. Take a few deep breaths. Stretch! Be thankful.

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Today is Day Three in the Third week of Advent

We light this third candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.

Shepherds, and flocks of sheep – and goats, and lost sheep, and pastures and still waters, a rod and staff, and lost sheep and oil ... there are many pastoral metaphors threaded through our understandings of the relationship between the Holy One and us human beings.

Feel free to choose one of these passages to read and reflect on today:

Ezekiel 34

John 10

Psalm 23

Luke 15

Matthew 25:31f

What aspect of the sheep – shepherd relationship is closest to your experience of how you and God are together?

When you are done, enter a time of contemplative centering prayer:

Centering prayer is not a way of turning on the presence of God. Rather it is a way of saying, "Here I am." The next step is up to God. It is a way of putting yourself at God's disposal, it is God who determines the consequences.

Thomas Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart, p.33

- Choose a sacred word as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within e.g . Immanuel, Abba, amen, peace - ask God to give a word for you
- Sitting comfortably with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word.
- When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word, thereby reaffirming your choice to be united with God. Let go again and again the distractions, the sounds, the feelings, the thoughts. Put yourself at God's disposal.
- Remain in stillness and silence, for 10, 15, or 20 minutes ..
- At the end of the prayer period, open your eyes and stay still and in silence for a couple of minutes.
- Be grateful. . . and don't evaluate!

Glory to God in the highest and peace and goodwill to all people on earth. AMEN

Today is Day Four in the Third week of Advent ~

We light this candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.

More about shepherds, from Micah 5 & John 10

But you, o Bethlehem of Ephrathah who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. And this one shall stand and feed her flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord God. And they shall live secure, for now their leader shall be great to the ends of the earth; and shall be the one of peace.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as my father knows me and I know my father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

If our nation looked for these qualities in our leaders, how would our nation be affected?

Think about areas of leading in your own life – at work, with children, in your community..... What do Micah's and John's perspectives remind you about?

“one flock, one shepherd” - could this be a significant part of the joy of the angels and surprise of the shepherds?

Take time again today to say “Here I am” to God, as did Mary, as did the shepherds.

- **Using your sacred word as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within , sit comfortably with eyes closed, and silently breathe your word several times .**
- **Become still and wordless.**
- **When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word, thereby reaffirming your choice to be united with God.**
- **Let go again and again the distractions, the sounds, the feelings, the thoughts. Put yourself at God's disposal.**
- **Remain in stillness and silence, for 15, or 20 minutes ..**
- **At the end of the prayer period, open your eyes and stay in silence for a couple of minutes.**
- **Be grateful. . . and don't evaluate!**

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Today is Day Five in the Third week of Advent ~

We light this candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.

More on angels in today's reading: entertaining them unawares, like the shepherds did.

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them he ran from the tent entrance, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My Lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought ... let me bring a little bread ..." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour ... and make cakes" Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good ... and hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the prepared calf and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" ... Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife shall have a son." Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh? ... Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" ... But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh.": for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes you did."

A lovely personal story here, (for more see Genesis 18:1 – 19). Messengers from the Most High can come at high noon as well as in the depths of night. What strikes you about Abraham's response to angels? And what about Sarah's response?

Have you ever been blessed by strangers? How did you react - more like Abraham or more like Sarah? Their message mayn't have been about your fertility (!), but nevertheless, you were suddenly "entertaining angels unawares".

Is there an invitation for you to become an angel? Does the Lord need your hands and feet and voice to bless someone you have never met before and will never see again?

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Day is Day Six in the Third Week of Advent ~

We light this candle to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds who had the privilege of welcoming the baby Jesus and telling everyone of their amazing night in Bethlehem.

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be

- **Using your sacred word as a symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within , sit comfortably with eyes closed, and silently breathe your word several times.**
- **Become still and wordless.**
- **When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word, thereby reaffirming your choice to be united with God.**
- **Let go again and again the distractions, the sounds, the feelings, the thoughts. Remain in stillness and silence, for 15 or 20 minutes ..**
- **At the end of the prayer period, open your eyes and stay still and silent for a couple more minutes. Be grateful. . .**

Where were the places of greatest resonance in your meditations this week?

Return to that reading and reflection again.

Ask God to take you deeper in what God's Spirit revealed to you. Wait for God.

As this third week of Advent draws to a close, be ready to join in the joy of the angels and the surprise of the humble shepherds as you notice God's nudges to share your experience of the Holy One, or to find still places of worship, or to entertain angels, or to lead differently, or become an unexpected guide or messenger.

Glory to God in the highest and peace and goodwill to all people on earth. AMEN