

HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE
Church and Community
Christmas Day 2015

You know how the world has gone a bit crazy? Political correctness has got us all in its grip?

I am very sorry to let you know that we begin this morning with some very bad news ... the union is on it.

The Union of Sheep Protectors (the USP) has made a formal complaint. There are three main issues: seating, heating and lighting ...

Seating

The new Health and Safety regulations insist that shepherds cannot watch their flocks by night without appropriate seating arrangements being provided. They cannot be expected to sit on the ground – it gets very uncomfortable.

Heating

The Union has also requested that, due to the inclement weather conditions at this time of year, the shepherds should be able to watch their flocks via cctv cameras from a locally situated, centrally heated, pastoral observation hut. They cannot be expected to sit on the ground – it gets very cold.

Lighting

Please note, the Union respectfully reminds the angel of the Lord that before shining all around she/he must make sure that all shepherds have been issued with

appropriate protective goggles. These must be capable of filtering out the harmful effects of UVA, UVB and Rays of Glory. They cannot be expected to sit on the ground, uncomfortable, cold and blinded by the light.

Clearly, being a shepherd has its ups and downs. It's not easy being a shepherd.

There was a very interesting item on the radio I heard about the possible link between the name of a person and the job they did ... so obviously with shepherd the clue is in the name – a shepherd would herd sheep. We will be talking more about them in a moment or two.

But on the radio they had also found:

former Royal Society for the Protection of Birds,
director of conservation

Mark Avery

an expert on Britain's mushrooms

Rebecca Morelle

Belgian footballer

Mark De Man

Legal expert

Lord Judge

Radio Gardener

Bob Flowerdew

MD of a dairy company

Bruno Fromage

Goalkeeper

Dominique Dropsy

Aviation planner

Rod Muddle

Dentist

Mr Phang (PH)

Partners in a Doctors Practice

De'Ath, Pain and Gore

They also discovered

A book on the Arctic by a **Mr Snowman**

The Chief Executive of the Howard League for Penal Reform, **Frances Crook**

This is not to mention that well-known firm of builders the **Crumblehomes** nor the Estate Agents – **Robham, Blind and Scarper!**

So let's turn our attention to Tom, Dick and Harry Shepherd and see what we can learn from them.

According to the bible story ...

Shepherds were ...

living in the fields

outdoor workers

lived over the shop

always available

no time off, no idea about shift patterns and no need to commute

keeping watch over their flock by night

alert

vigilant

attentive

nocturnal

terrified

the angel appears and then speaks message about good news, great joy, the sign, a child wrapped in cloth lying in manger

and then the heavenly host appears

I am not surprised they were terrified!

The story goes on ...

They said to one another – let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing which has taken place

I bet they didn't. I bet they something more like: Flip, what on earth was that all about? Or whatever did the barmaid put in my shandy?

They went with haste

in a hurry – clearly excited by what they had heard and seen

They found Mary and Joseph and the child

This of course raises all sorts of questions: did they do a search of the town? Did they ask the locals? Did they have a satnav, an i-phone, google maps, an ordnance survey map or just a hunch? We don't know ... but we do know: they find the mum, the dad and the baby.

They made known what had been told them about the child and all who heard it were amazed
put two and two together and spilled the beans

They returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen
could not keep quiet
lives were changed

So Tom, Dick and Harry Shepherd have quite a night of it. The chances are that, after all that excitement, “honest to goodness” shepherding became rather boring!

What about us?
What have we heard and seen?
Is this story about the birth of Jesus for us a story we keep quiet about or is it a story we live out and want to share with others?

This Christmas may I suggest that we think again about the job God gave the shepherds to do in the story. To find and then tell other people about the baby. We might ask whether that’s a job we could do too.

And finally, notice with me, if you will, that the baby’s name is not mentioned in the story Luke tells. Not at this point anyway.

He may not be named. He is described, though, in v11 as “Saviour and Messiah and Lord”. He’s got three

names, if you like. Which we might translate as “chosen, anointed rescuer”.

The clue is in the name. Like the shepherds who herd sheep, this baby came to do some serious stuff: he was to be the “chosen, anointed rescuer”. The clue to what this would be in his names. He had plans. And, when he grew up, people got to hear about those plans and decided to follow him and join the adventure.

So this Christmas perhaps we too like the shepherds can find the baby and tell other people about him both in words and in how we live. Because following the chosen anointed rescuer (something one third of the current population of the world have decided to do) is a lot more exciting than following a pop star, a football team or a celebrity chef. Following the chosen anointed rescuer makes Strictly seem like a dance competition, Downton seem like a period drama and The X Factor like a talent show!

And if you would like to pursue this at all, in the new year we will be running a short course called “Alpha” starting on Thursday 14 Jan at 7.30pm.

Thank you for listening so well. May today be all that you hope for and much more. And may I wish you a very happy and peaceful Christmas and my very best wishes for the New Year.

Dear Lord Jesus, please help me this Christmas to see you more clearly, to love you more dearly, and to follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.