

**Sermon**  
**24 December 2014**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

**By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald**

**Text: Luke 2:8-20**

**Watchnight**

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Shepherds.

People we might think of as good, honest, hard working men. But people whom we looked down upon in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world, where Jesus was born.

In a society where *who* you were was more important than anything else, where *who* you were was directly connected to what would become of you and your whole family - nobody wanted to become a shepherd. Because, to be quite blunt – shepherds were despised.

Why? Because shepherds were away from home at night. And any man in those days who was worth anything, put a very high priority on keeping his family safe. And how can you take care of your family if you are never there?

So even if you had a distant relation, like you're second cousin's son who lived so far away that nobody would even know he existed, who was a shepherd, you would never mention it in good company. To *lie*

about having a shepherd in the family was more acceptable than having to face the shame of admitting it!

To top all this, shepherds were often considered to be thieves, because they sometimes grazed their flocks on other people's property.

But – somebody had to do it! The sheep had to be taken care of, and this was a hard job – because food and water was scarce in a warm and dry place like Palestine.

In contrast to sheperds, sheep were really important – because in a society where most people were very poor, if you had a sheep or two, you could make a living. The wool could be used for clothes; the skin to make tents with; the meat could be eaten, sold or traded; the milk could be drunk; and the horns could be used as musical instuments or vessels to store fluids in.

So it's quite shocking to think that people who valued their sheep so much, cared so little for the *people* who took care of their sheep!

But then... Everything changed when Jesus was born. Because of *all* the people the angels *could* appear to, they chose to appear to the shepherds in the fields!

So these people, who were looked down upon by the rest of society, were the first official witnesses to the birth of the Son of God.

God doesn't look at us the same way other people do. God trusted those unimportant people with the most important message of all times. And they didn't fail him.

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People today.

Doctors, nurses, teachers, cleaners, engineers, accountants, shopkeepers, waiters, ministers, farmers, politicians, young, old, newborn, retired, popular, lonely, famous, shy, important, unimportant... I could probably add on to this list until next Christmas – in God's eyes, we are all the same.

I could just as well have said – blablabla... No matter who you are, what you do, or what other people think of you, to God you are important. He sent Jesus to earth to save us all. And he wants all of us to go tell this to the world.

The sheperds didn't think that they were too important to go to meet Jesus. As a matter of fact, they couldn't get there quickly enough! But likewise they didn't think that they were too unimportant to spread the word about his birth – they realised that they were special, because God trusted them with this very important news.

God still trusts us, all of us, with this today. Let's do him proud. After all, he sent his son to come to save us.

God sent his son to come to save *you*.

Let's just take a minute to take in how amazing that is...

There were shepherds on the fields that **night**... (*Lights & Christmas tree lights off*)

An angel appeared to them and the glory of the Lord **shone** around them... (*Christmas tree lights on*)

A great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, **praising** God... (*Catriona plays the flute*)

(*Once Catriona stops playing, side lights on.*)

Once the angels left and the sheperds went to Bethlehem as they were told to, they saw the baby, they spread the word, and all who heard it were *amazed*.

We've heard this story a million times before. And once again tonight. Let's never stop to be *amazed* at how much God loves us.

Amen