



## Outsiders

Rev Cate Thorn

Year B, Christmas Eve

Isaiah 9: 2-7; Luke 2: 1-20

24 December 2023

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
Those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has  
shined.

Upon shepherds in dark night fields luminous light from angelic host  
appears.

This night we're in darkness, anticipating, hoping in this darkness for  
the in breaking glimmer of God presence with us. This is a time we  
might let that be true, let that in, open ourselves to receive.

We're in this Christian place and its Christmas Eve. As we hear the  
readings we're primed to listen for the story about the soon to be  
family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus.

However if we listen closely to **Luke's** story it seems to be more  
about the shepherds. The shepherds are bathed in angelic light, the  
shepherds see and hear and understand the angelic message, the  
shepherds decide to check out whether the story adds up, the  
shepherds tell Mary and Joseph the good news, they're the  
messengers who tell of angels revealing to them Jesus importance.

What of it, you might ask? Surely shepherds have a solid place in  
Jewish history, after all David who became a king started his career  
as a shepherd? Yes but things change over time in the career sector,  
as you know. By Jesus time shepherding had become a profession

most likely to be filled from the bottom rung of the social ladder, by persons who could not find what was regarded as decent work. Society stereotyped shepherds as liars, degenerates, and thieves. The testimony of shepherds was not admissible in court, and many towns had ordinances barring shepherds from their city limits. The religious establishment took a particularly dim view of shepherds since the regular exercise of shepherds' duties kept them from observing the Sabbath and rendered them ritually unclean. The Pharisees classed shepherds with tax collectors and prostitutes, persons who were "sinners" by virtue of their vocation.

In the darkness, to the least respected least trusted and most doubted, angelic light shone. To those most likely to have given up hoping, or believing, or trusting anyone cared or that they'd belong anywhere, the message came. Into the darkness, to those in their dark emptied-out space, angelic light shone. Terrified, overwhelmed, yet not overcome they received, acted, tested then told of the good news message of hope given them. The least trusted were entrusted to bear and bring a message of hope, light in time of darkness.

We live in difficult and dark times. It's genuinely hard to not be overcome. When in darkness the idea of light is of course there, how else would you know you were in darkness? But to understand this light as something that could bring actual change, be transforming, how are we with that? It's hard to hold the idea of hope that will change things in real time when we live in a world that tells us those who hold power, influence and wealth can do as they like and not be held accountable.

Yet tonight we hear it's into such deepest darkness that light appears. It's upon those who dwell in the dark places of a community, in the dark contours of our lives that light shines. In such darkness the shepherds saw, received, acted and told of the

light. Through their witness the angelic proclamation was made known, the identity of God presence was proclaimed.

We can easily become people who tell only of the darkness for it is always before us, told us, known to us. Yet it's not the whole story, it's darkness because it's not light. We call it this only because of light.

In light life flourishes, we see this, we receive it, and we can act and tell of it. Maybe if we decide to insist, to act and speak and be people who live in light the balance will start to shift, in us for starters.

This Christmas day maybe we can make a start. Those long ago shepherds, blinded by angel light were compelled to go and check out, test whether this good news story was actually a thing. Their telling of light and good news opened the eyes of Mary to ponder, to wonder more deeply about the gift of new life given her and the light this might bring.

Each time we open ourselves to discern light, even, maybe especially in darkness, whether it only be slightest glimmer we can decide to seek and follow where it leads. As we do we find that we grow in strength, courage and tenacity to **be** people of light, people who see and receive light into our life and then act to tell of this. To tell of the light we see in the people around us and the world we inhabit.