

Luke 2:8-20

Today is the shortest day and longest night of the year.

This is also the night that we gather to remember the names of 18 people who died last year. 18 people who, at least in some way, were like the Shepherds to whom the Angels announced the surprising news about Jesus birth.

These 18 people we remember tonight, like these Shepherds, lived in the fields.

Did you notice that bit about the Christmas story? The **first people** God's angels chose to announce to the world that the Savior had been born were **living outside, under the stars, in the fields**. They were **homeless**.

Luke says: "In that region there were shepherds *living in the fields . . .*" And the Angel of the Lord stood before **them** to say: 'Do not be afraid. 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 Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord'."

After giving us the names and offices of the powerful of his day –

- Tiberius Caesar
- Governor Pontius Pilate of Judea
- Herod Tetrarch of Galilee
- Philip Tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis
- Lysanias Tetrarch of Abilene
- Annas and Caiaphas the high priests

Luke says the Angel of the Lord stood before **none of them** to announce the news of Jesus' birth.

Bypassing the centers of power, the Angel of the Lord goes straight to the people who don't get invited to be guests of honor at the head table to tell them first that God has come to bring salvation to the world that he loves so much.

I think that reveals something about God.

God looks with favor upon the lowly. God does not overlook or ignore the poor. God has good news for the poor.

The world may not notice or make a lot of fuss when someone without a home dies, but God notices.

The world may think of the poor and homeless as a problem to be solved, a problem for business owners, a problem for tourists . . . But God sees human beings made in the image of God who need dignity, need a hand up, need support, need friendship and accountability just like everybody does.

I like that we are **naming our 18 homeless friends** who have died tonight, but I want to suggest that this is just a start. This is just a little glimpse of what God wants to show the world through this savior who was first announced to some homeless shepherds.

It is not enough that we name those who have died. Some of you actually knew them, and that is where we want to go.

Our world of sin and darkness encourages us to keep our distance from each other. And Jesus came to show us a God who is not interested in staying at a distance from us.

Because the Christmas story tells us that God moved into the world at the margins, we can assume that God is interested in drawing a great big circle around all of us. God's good news isn't only for those at the margins. It just often gets heard and understood by people at the margins first. When God came to the margins of our world, God was drawing a great big circle around it in love.

So, one way we participate in the Good News of Jesus is by naming our 18 homeless friends who have died tonight, and some of you may have some memories you'd like to share about their lives.

**There is a next step though . . .** The next step is to join the angels in moving close to someone who is different from you in order to see the image of God in them.

Sometimes we treat one another as simply objects to get what we want, rather than human beings made in the image of God.

What if we looked at one another as more than a hungry mouth to feed?

What if we looked at one another as more than a competitor for what we need?

What if we looked at one another as children of God with gifts and strength and power?

What if we looked at one another like the Angel looked at those shepherds living in the field?

What if we looked at one another as worthy, beautiful, gifted, bearers of the best news the world has ever known?