

2018-12-24 ... Midnight Service Christmas Eve ... Revd Canon Judy Hunt

Luke 2: 8 – 20

'It IS you'!

Introduction ...

Can you remember 'life before the National Lottery'?

If you – like me – are old enough to say 'yes' then you might also be able to remember the advertising campaign running up to the launch of the National Lottery:

A giant hand was shown – hovering over the roof tops of houses ... until finally a finger reached down to single out just one house with the words: **'It could be you!'** Some people found the ad more scary than enticing ...

... which is certainly how the shepherds felt in tonight's Christmas reading ... strange goings on ...

**The glory of the Lord shone around them ...
and they were terrified.**

Why that reaction ...

This year, this Christmas, it's worth pausing to ponder a little more about the shepherds and their reaction.

They lived in turbulent times. They lived as members of a nation – Israel – which wasn't sure where it belonged, who was in charge, where its future lay.

We may be living 2000 years later and in a different part of the world – but some of that rings true for us ... not sure where we belong, not sure who is in charge, not sure where our future lies.

And there were other things particular to shepherds of that time ... they were not really sure of their own place within their own people: the most loved, the most revered past King of Israel – had been a shepherd – King David, much Old Testament imagery reveres the shepherding role – has God as shepherd ... yet shepherds were also outsiders, worked unsociable hours, were not able to keep to usual religious and social customs – so were 'unclean'... yet the Israelites also relied on them for food ... and for religious sacrificial animals.

Similarly in our society – there are those on whom we rely ... yet who can feel undervalued or excluded from 'ordinary life': care workers, those who do our road or rail works, emergency service workers, refuse collectors ... and many others.

Imagine a gang working on the A41 or the M6 tonight ... and an angel appearing to them ... they wouldn't expect to be the ones entrusted with this kind of experience, this kind of good news ... they too would probably be terrified ... and whatever reaction the shepherds got from their friends and family as they recounted the events of the night ... well, I'd guess it wouldn't be that far off the reaction our road gang would encounter too!

Incredulity:

'Don't be daft ... what had you taken? Were you drunk?'

'Why would an angel appear to you?'

Conclusion ...

But remember that 'Lottery Hand'? Hovering over ... and then associated with the

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words **'It could be you ...'**

Statistically, highly improbable ...

Yet millions of us, since that ad, have taken the bait ...

Well, contrast that with the events around Bethlehem that we're gathering to celebrate once again.

Not a lottery – dependent on luck.

Not a message – **'It COULD be you'**.

For although it began with the shepherds, it spread out ...

So: Rather it's an offer to all – to everyone: **'It IS you'**

You – each of you, each of us has a Messiah, a Saviour,

someone who will walk beside us ...

who will live within us, one whose light is steadfast and certain ...

Whether – in those days: a shepherd, a King, young parents, old sages, refugees, innkeepers ...

Whether today – employed, unemployed, young, old, pillar of society, overlooked by society, in Europe, out of Europe ... because of the Christmas event we have good reason to celebrate:

God with us.

Amen.