

Luke 1: 1 – 14

'Scam or Stunt?'

Well, that must have been quite a shock for them ... **Brrrr! Brrrr! Brrrr ...** (*Pol rings Revd Judy on her mobile*)

Oh – I'm so sorry – that's my phone – excuse me a minute ...

What?

You want my date of birth?

No – I'm not going to 'press one'

No – I'm not going to give you my personal details

No – I don't believe you that the HMRC owes me £76.53

Have you had scam calls, texts or emails like that in the run up to Christmas ... I've had plenty.

Though, this one today was more of a stunt than a scam! *Thanks, Pol!!*

Scams or stunts ... they can have a massive effect on us if we don't spot them ... if we 'fall for them' ... but they can still have a more hidden effect on us even if we avoid being drawn into them.

They can make us cynical ... they can make us distrusting of anyone and anything. We can stick so tightly to the saying: "If something seems too good to be true ... **it is** too good to be true" – and in so doing we can miss out on what friends, family and even God want to give us – out of love and with no strings attached.

Think back to those shepherds:

- Angels appearing in the sky
- Words being spoken by those angels
- A chorus of angels singing

How would farm workers respond to that today?

How would you or I respond to that today?

"Oh it'll be a stunt by that lot staying over there"

"Must be a scam ... if we go down to Bethlehem – we'll be mugged on the way"

"Either that or they'll be here to steal the sheep"

I bet they recorded that music to fool us"

And those shepherds would then have missed out on so much – they wouldn't have been to Bethlehem; they wouldn't have seen the proof that the angel's message was accurate ... we don't know what happened to the shepherds afterwards – but they couldn't have been unchanged.

Mind you – I bet when they talked about that night, some of their families and friends accused them of falling for a scam or stunt or being drunk!

A danger for us, is that we can become so suspicious of everything, that what God wants to give us is rejected because we're worried that it's a scam.

Thankfully those shepherds were open to hearing God – and if we'd read further, we'd have been reminded that they hurried into Bethlehem (and that they recounted what had happened. And we're told that Mary 'pondered' all this – perhaps it was really important to her – she hadn't got it wrong – this baby really was God the Son.)

This Christmas – let's remember that God's love is freely given. As we face the uncertainties of 2021 – let's remember that Jesus came to show that God wants to walk alongside us – to guide us, comfort us and empower us.

That is the Good News of Comfort and Joy – even amidst Covid-19!

PTO

I'll finish with a short reflective prayer along these lines, adapted from an Iona one:

Emmanuel, God with us

We doubt what we cannot prove
We ignore what we cannot see
We're all too aware of fake news
And finding little room for faith
We acknowledge

We suspect angels and disbelieve Good News

Our scepticism is the fruit of our experience
But you ask
"Is it the key to the future?"

Our suspiciousness helps us to smell a rat
But you ask
"And can you recognise the dove?"

We then need to acknowledge

We suspect angels and disbelieve Good News

So, Lord, this Christmas tide
Give us a share of that divine naiveté
enjoyed by
Elizabeth and Zechariah
Mary and Joseph
and the un-named shepherds
who encountered angels, that we too may
believe the Good News
and recognise Christ among us.

Amen