

Luke 2: 8 – 20

What do you call a dancing sheep? **A baaaa-lerina**

Where do sheep go to watch funny videos? **Ewe – tube**

What do you call a sheep covered in chocolate? **A chocolate baaar**

Well, I wonder if those shepherds up in the hills above Bethlehem spent their nights telling each other jokes and stories. I bet they did! Imagine long, cold nights, having to live outside often for days on end. The sheep around Bethlehem belonged to the Temple in Jerusalem, but I don't think the shepherds ever got invited there. They weren't important enough to go to the proper places where the Priests and Rulers went, so they sat up on the hills keeping those sheep safe. I don't think they ever got paid much, or were allowed to join in Temple feasts when – sorry about this – sheep was on the menu. If they ever had shepherd's pie they had to make it themselves ...

So probably no one much noticed the shepherds ... but they were noticed by God and our Christmas story wouldn't be much without them would it?

Here we are: Christmas Day 2021 ... somehow we've all reached Christmas ... we've got mixed feelings. Some things have been very sad, some things actually make us happy, but we're glad to be here today after another difficult year ...

We've just heard a story that also happened in very difficult times. There was a bad king on the throne, there were invaders from Rome running the country and something amazing happens and it seems to involve these usually unimportant shepherds!

It's a story that everyone should know ... Actually a lot of people do know about the shepherds because we have all seen or been in nativity plays, some of you may even have been shepherds or sheep in those plays. People know a bit of the story of Christmas, but it's not always easy to make them understand how important this tale of shepherds really is ...

I'd like to retell the story a little this morning by asking you to help me with a list of words ... so here goes ...

If I say the word **CHRISTMAS** what word comes into your head? (*folk called out various things, some being Nativity related*)

In a recent survey for a big newspaper when the same question was asked **can you guess what the top 5 answers were (the 5 most popular)?**

1. **Presents**
2. **Family**
3. **Turkey**
4. **Brussels sprouts**
5. **Angels**

Well, how can we use those words and still tell people the story of the birth of Jesus and the part the shepherds played in that story ...

1. **Presents** – were there any presents? **Lambs** given to Jesus not expensive presents, but what they could afford ... for us it was the birth of Christ himself which was and is the greatest gift ever given to us and that reminds us that we also need to give gifts to celebrate his birth: whatever we can afford in Jesus' name and out of love for those in need.

2. **Family** – any family in the story ... The shepherds (were probably all related = family jobs) but most importantly they came down from the hills to see – Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus = the family of God. The family to which we all belong.
3. **Turkey** – not sure, but if we put it with number 4 brussels sprouts ... and – two names that remind us that food comes from all over the world, even if the shepherds didn't eat sprouts, they definitely had cabbage and chicken ... perhaps that was their dinner that night, but we should all give thanks for our food especially today as we celebrate Jesus' birthday.
4. **Angels** – well they woke those shepherds up didn't they ... and what a shake they gave them ... But don't be afraid ... imagine the shining lights in the sky, the voices and songs ... the light of Christ coming into the world and the humble shepherds running helter-skelter down the hill to find him ... The first to see him. Perhaps we should be running too out of sheer joy.

There are plenty of words we can think of **Christ** – mas ... but perhaps with the shepherds we need to jump up and tell people what we've heard, what we've seen, point out the real words of Christmas ... and get to that stable.

Amen.