

**Prayer**

**Introduction**

Slips of paper with:

**Coming home really is sometimes the ideal solution because  
on rainy nights few other retreats yield options undercover.**

There is a coded message in that sentence

Has anyone discovered it?

First letter of each word .....

**Christ is born for you**

If we're prepared to pause and ponder over that sentence – a whole new meaning emerges that wasn't immediately obvious.

The Biblical narrative of the birth of Jesus can be described in the same way.

On the surface – the birth of another baby – joy for the family but 'so what' otherwise???

Well, rather a lot if we take on board the Angels' messages to Mary and Joseph before Jesus was born.

Rather a lot more than only the birth of another baby if we take on board what we just heard about the shepherds and their experiences.

Here's one take on that: **Meditation of the sheep ...** (David and Steve did following dialogue)

**"I've never seen them move so fast!**

**One moment sprawled around the camp fire –**

**and the next – up and off into the night –**

**heading for Bethlehem, I think they said.**

**Well, sheep we may be,**

**but even we knew that something was afoot,**

**actually – something momentous,**

**truly special.**

**For they've never abandoned us before**

**not even for a second ...**

**what with wolves and the like**

**prowling around in the darkness.**

**Then we were terrified –**

**more even than just before the shepherds went off**

**when the strange light had appeared in the sky,**

**PTO**

causing them to grovel in the dust,  
then dash off like men possessed.

You're right there – we were terrified  
for we heard howling in the distance  
and then sensed the howling was getting closer and closer  
nearer and nearer  
until the shape of the prowling animals began to take shape ...

Yes – they looked ready to pounce  
anticipating their kill  
We were so scared ... waiting for the end  
... hot breath upon us  
... slobbering jaws gaping wide ...

But suddenly ... human voices  
.. and laughter  
... and the danger gone  
The shepherds were back at last ... what a relief!

And joy ... and delight!  
We'd faced death and been saved!

But I tell you what ..  
and this is something very strange ...  
Those shepherds seemed happier even than us

Yes – they were beside themselves with excitement  
almost as if they'd been saved too!

What was it, I wonder, that they saw that night?

It must have been good!

*Adapted from The Bumper Book of Resources  
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Looking beyond the obvious, looking into the deeper meaning.

That's what we're invited to do this Christmas – in the words of the Carol with which this service began:

*“For that Child, so dear and gentle  
Is our Lord in heaven above”*

And looking ahead to our closing Carol:

*“Jesus, our Emmanuel”*

Our God 'with us' – not against us or indifferent to us ... but **with us ...**

So much more than 'just' the birth of another baby ... lovely though that is! **Amen.**