

Christmas  
Luke 2: 1-20

Trinity Episcopal Church  
Sonoma, California

A Holy Light:  
A Christmas Meditation by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

On a cold winter's night on a hillside not far from Bethlehem, shepherds gather with their flocks. Together, they have a better chance of surviving those late night watches. Some huddle by the fire; others stand watch. In the depth of darkness, a shepherd sees a light. Perhaps he wakes the others with a shout. Perhaps he doesn't need to wake them. Perhaps they, too have seen the light. Perhaps they, too, have felt the presence of the Angel of the Lord.

In the darkest watches of the night, they hear a voice.

“Do not be afraid; for 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.”

They must have been incredulous. The Angel of the Lord coming to them—outcasts, untouchables, the poorest of the working poor. The Angel of the Lord appearing to them in the darkest hour of the night.

No wonder their hearts are stirred. No wonder they say to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place.” No wonder they set off with haste.

They bundle up their hopes and fears, their deep disappointments and their tender longings and head towards the light.

They round a corner and see ahead of them a stable. A lamp is lighted. There, in that dark night, in a cold, dank stable; there in the mess of it all—the hay, the straw, the cow dung, and the blood-soaked rags, the shepherds find a baby—radiant beams streaming from his Holy face. By his manger they lay their gifts—their hopes and fears, their deep disappointments and their tender longings.

Perhaps they linger for a while, basking in the light. Then they depart, returning to their fields. But they are changed. Emboldened. Those lowly shepherds have become messengers of God. Bringing light to other darkened lives.

Are we so different from those shepherds?

We, too, are beckoned by the light.

We, too, bundle up our hopes and fears, our deep disappointments and our tender longings and head towards that light.

We, too, rush off to meet the baby, the Holy one of God.

I suppose each of us brings to this night memories we treasure—memories of other Christmases, memories of people no longer with us who in their own way brightened our lives with their light.

I imagine each of us cherishes a moment in this Christmas service—a carol, the lights, the faithful gathered around the table. Perhaps the moment the lights of the church are darkened and we begin to sing Silent Night. Candles touch candles. On this night, we bring the light of Christ to one another and as we do faces take on a most amazing glow.

For a moment, all is calm, all is bright, and there is peace—the deep peace that this night brings. The peace the shepherds knew. The peace that comes from knowing that we are deeply loved by Love himself. Rest in that heavenly peace.