

Dear Heavenly Father We ask to see the wonder and surprise of your presence in unexpected places.

I love these few days between Christmas and New Year. The gifts have been unwrapped, the turkey finished, Love Actually watched yet another time! Our family are with us and we are going to the pantomime this afternoon. Right now I'm feeling very fortunate and blessed. But I'm well aware that not everyone is feeling this way.

If we go back in time, I wonder how the shepherds were feeling before the angel appeared. They were ordinary working people, they may have felt content, cheerful or sad, suffering in some way. We don't know. They were probably just settling down for another ordinary night, they'd had supper, the embers of the fire still burning at the entrance of the cave, their sheep safe within.

Then suddenly, unexpectedly, something happens! Maybe a bright light accompanying the angelic visitation.

Words that bring them the good news that Jesus has been born in Bethlehem. But not only an angel's visit, as if that wasn't enough, they were sung to by a heavenly choir.

Praising God and singing:

"Glory to God in the highest heaven
and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests".

However we imagine the shepherds' experience it was clearly amazing, awesome! Far from ordinary! I imagine they were terrified yet fascinated at the same time. Captivated by the angel's words. An intervention direct from God.

This extraordinary experience would shape the rest of their lives.

This God given experience energised them, motivated them to take action. We are told they hurried to Bethlehem to see for themselves.

We are so fortunate to have the Bible full of all these wonderful experiences written down for us. But often we forget that the Bible is the Living Word of God. It's alive, active and timeless. In essence, what was true 2000 years ago is true now. The context will be different but God operates in the same way now as He did then. We also can share in and experience God's extraordinary presence now and be part of stories that change the lives of others.

So what might the words of the angelic choir mean for us today?

"Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace
to those on whom his favour rests".

Words direct from God. Words full of promise. "on earth peace".

The promise of world peace. That's something to hope and pray for as we enter the new year. This promise is repeated many times in the Bible.

Isaiah prophesied the birth of Jesus 7 centuries before the event. He wrote that Jesus would be the “Prince of Peace”, that of “the greatness of His government and peace there will be no end”. (Isa9:6-7).

Jesus and his followers greeted each other with the word shalom, the Hebrew word for peace. We uphold this tradition when we share the “Peace” every Sunday. Jesus is our peace, reconciling our messed up, broken human life, with the God of love for whom nothing is impossible. Even in times of pain and suffering, this is the truth.

Peace on earth. Peace for the whole world. This feels so big, so overwhelming! Logically impossible. But we look to an all powerful God who keeps His promises.

As the Angel’s words spurred the shepherds into action is there anything we can do to join Jesus as He extends His peace on earth?

We know that in the Kingdom of God small things matter. When Jesus is around amazing things happen. One boy’s lunch feeds over 5000 people.

We may feel powerless but there are still things we can do on an individual basis.

How about:

Forgiveness: any time we forgive someone who has upset us.

Reconciliation: any time we take a step towards calming distress and drawing people together.

Remaining silent: when we choose to hold our tongue rather than speak words of anger and irritation.

As we do this we join Jesus as incarnations of God’s peace on earth for however long it takes.

So please never think there is nothing you can do. Small things matter especially when Jesus is involved. He makes the ordinary extraordinary! He is our peace!

Amen.