

HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE
Church and Community
Christmas Day 2011

***While shepherds watched
Their flocks by night
All seated on the ground
The angel of the Lord came down
And glory shone around***

I am very to say that we begin this morning with some very bad news ... the Union of Sheep Protectors (the USP) has complained that it breaches Health and Safety regulations to insist that shepherds watch their flocks without the appropriate seating arrangements being provided. Therefore benches, stools and orthopaedic chairs are now available.

Shepherds have also requested that, due to the inclement weather conditions at this time of year, they should watch their flocks via cctv cameras from a locally situated, centrally heated pastoral observation hut.

Please note, the angel of the Lord is reminded that before shining his / her glory all around she/he must ascertain that all shepherds have been issued with the appropriate protective goggles capable of filtering out the harmful effects of UVA, UVB and

rays of Glory. Clearly, being a shepherd has its ups and downs.

There was a very interesting item this week on the radio I heard about the possible link between the name of a person and the job they did ... so obviously with shepherd the clue is in the name – a shepherd would herd sheep. They had also found:

Mark Avery	former RSPB director of conservation
Rebecca Morelle	an expert on Britain's mushrooms
Mark De Man	Belgian footballer
Lord Judge	Legal expert
Bob Flowerdew	Radio Gardener
Bruno Fromage	MD of a dairy company
Larry Speakes	White House spokesperson
Dominique Dropsy	Goalkeeper
Rod Muddle	Aviation planner
Mr Phang (PH)	Dentist
De'Ath, Pain and Gore	Doctors

They also discovered
A book on the Arctic by a Mr Snowman
Frances Crook the Chief Executive of the Howard League for Penal Reform
Scientific paper on the subject of incontinence by authors Splatt and Weedon.

This is not to mention that well-known firm of builders the Crumblehomes nor the Estate Agents – Robham, Blind and Scarper.

Frances Crook apparently had always thought that her "Crook" had more to do with the tool of choice for shepherds. And, of course, many surnames, after all, evolved through being used this other way around, so it was that a person's family profession would determine their name - hence all those Butchers, Bakers, Smiths and Taylors in the phone book.

So let's turn our attention to Tom, Dick and Harry Shepherd and see what we can learn from them.

According to the bible story ...

Shepherds were ...

living in the fields

outdoor workers
lived over the shop
always available
no time off, no idea about shift patterns and no need to commute

keeping watch over their flock by night

alert

vigilant
attentive
nocturnal

were terrified

the angel appears and then speaks message about good news, great joy, a Saviour, Messiah, the Lord sign = child wrapped in cloth lying in manger and then the heavenly host appears
I am not surprised they were terrified!

said to one another – let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing which has taken place

I bet they didn't. I bet they something more like: Flip, what on earth was that all about? Or whatever did the barmaid put in my Lucozade?

they went with haste

in a hurry – clearly excited by what they had heard and seen

they found Mary and Joseph and the child

This of course raises all sorts of questions: did they do a search of the town? did they ask the locals? did they have a satnav or just a hunch?
They find the mum, the dad and the baby

**they made known what had been told them
about the child and all who heard it were
amazed**

put two and two together and spilled the beans

**returned, glorifying and praising God for all
they had heard and seen**

could not keep quiet

lives were changed

the chances are that honest to goodness

shepherding after all that excitement became rather
boring

So Tom, Dick and Harry Shepherd have quite a
night of it.

What about us?

What have we heard and seen?

Is this story about the birth of Jesus for us a story
we keep quiet about or is it a story we live out and
want to share with others?

This Christmas may I suggest that we think again
about the job God gave the shepherds to do in the
story. To find and then tell other people about the
baby. We might ask whether that's a job we could
do too.

And finally, notice with me if you will that the baby's
name is not mentioned in the story Luke tells. Not
at this point anyway. He may not be named. He is

described, though, as Saviour and Messiah and
Lord. He's got three names. Which we might
translate as "chosen, anointed rescuer". The clue is
in the name ... this baby came to do some serious
stuff. He had plans. And, when he grew up, people
got to hear about those plans and decided to follow
him and join the adventure.

So this Christmas perhaps we too like the
shepherds can find the baby and tell other people
about him in words and in how we live. Because
following the chosen anointed rescuer is a lot more
exciting than following a pop star, a football team or
a celebrity chef. Following the chosen anointed
rescuer makes Strictly seem like a dance
competition, and Downton Abbey seem like a
period drama!

Thank you for listening so well. May Christmas this
year be all that you hope for and more. And may I
wish you a very happy and peaceful Christmas and
my very best wishes for the New Year.

Perhaps I can finish with a prayer?

Dear Lord Jesus, please help me this Christmas
To see you more clearly, to love you more dearly,
and to follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

And if you would like to pursue this at all in the new
year we will be running a short course called
"Journeys" starting on Wed 11 Jan at 7.30pm.