



The Adoration of the shepherds by Reni (1640s)

It's rather a lovely thought that in this part of the country it was shepherds who were given the first message about the birth of Christ.

In first century Palestine shepherds were the lowest in society. They were very poor, living a hand-to-mouth existence. It was impossible for them to keep to the Jewish laws and ritual cleaning living as they did on the hillsides with their animals. They were therefore perpetually unclean.

That the Good News was brought to them first, establishes the strong theme running throughout Luke's Gospel that Christ is for the poor the outcast and the marginalised.

The scene in this painting is of an ordinary family with ordinary working people 'God in the Ordinary.' The baby, like all babies, holds our attention. And just like the previous Nativity painting he is the source of light

The Shepherds story links the baby with the central image from Hebrew Scriptures applied to God as the Good Shepherd. And Jesus as the Lamb of God, like the Passover lamb, He will bring God's people to a new freedom.

'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.' Luke 2. 10-12 & 15-17

Welcome all Wonders in one sight
Eternity shut in a span
Summer to winter, day into night
Heaven in earth and God in man
Great little one whose all-embracing birth
Lifts earth to heaven
 Stoops heaven to earth.