

Sermon preached by Revd Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

Christmas Day A 2022

Watching Shepherds Surprised by Joy

There were shepherds keeping watch that night, watching over their sheep.

They watched, staying up late to care and protect their sheep. They were one of the few people awake at that hour of night, much like today when it is those who have a care for others who watch late into the night – the doctors and nurses, those who listen at the end of the phone, the emergency services, fathers and mothers watching over little ones.

And of course don't forget the children waiting to see if Santa has come...

I wonder what you watch out for this Christmas?

I wonder who you watch out for?

To watch is to be open, to care, to long for someone or something.

On that Christmas night it was to those who watched that God's angels came and sang.

The angels sang their good news of great joy of a child born and wrapped in a manger.

The shepherds did not expect that their weary night of watching would bring heaven to earth with a joyful chorus of angels.

The Christmas story reminds us how God comes to us in unexpected ways.

Joy can be found in the dark, whilst we are tired and weary going about our normal lives, watching for hope amid chaos and longing to know what it all means.

The hopeful news of joy breaks in when often we are not looking for it.

The shepherds were not expecting such a thing to happen.

No wonder they were terrified!

When they see the angels they hear the message of hope and trust it.

They trust the message and go in search of the child wrapped and lying in the manger. They are the ones who go in haste, all tiredness gone.

They are the first to share the news of hope and joy with Mary and Joseph.

They discover the joy of a newly born baby and share in the delight that new life brings.

They are open to see the new life and are changed by it.

They are like all who have good news to share and can't wait to tell it to everyone.

It is for all of us who watch, for all who long for something more that good news of great joy is here. To watch is about caring and protecting and loving.

For the best news is that heaven has come on earth, God watches over us.

God longs for us so much that God took the step to become one of us in Jesus, in a vulnerable little baby.

God came to share our lives, to walk with us and be among us and share all the ups and downs of our lives – to love us.

God continues to be with us in life and in death and beyond death to say to those who watch and wait that I watch and wait with you, I am with you to bring you life and joy and hope.

The shepherds returned with praising God to their lives as shepherds and yet were changed.

I wonder what they did next?

I wonder how this story became part of them, the wonder and mystery, the love of being surprised by joy.

May we too be open to how God comes within us to give joy and hope.

May we know that God is with us, may we hold that joy and hope in our hands and cradle it as we are held and cradled by God's love this day.

May we watch with hope and find joy and love.

Happy Christmas.

*Lections:
Isaiah 62.6-12
Psalm 97
Luke 2.8-20*