

Shepherds and the Good Shepherd (5) Visitors in the night



As we have seen over the past weeks, shepherds played an important part in the history of the people of Israel. Nevertheless, they were not regarded very highly in Judaea at the time of the birth of Jesus. Because they were often away from home tending their flocks, they found it difficult to keep all the requirements of the Jewish Law about ritual washing, correct food preparation and so on. What is more, without the showers and instant hot water that we take for granted these days, they would have been rather smelly. Anyone who has ever handled sheep will know that their aroma tends to linger!

A group of shepherds, however, were granted the privilege of hearing the message of the angels that the promised Saviour had been born. They were the first visitors to the newborn King. And where did they find Him? It was in Bethlehem, the birthplace of David, the shepherd who became a king.

To many folk it may seem strange that such humble men were chosen by God to welcome the royal arrival. In the Bible we read again and again of God calling apparently unlikely people to do His work. As the Beatitudes remind us, God's blessed ones are often very different from those who attract the admiration and applause of the world.

A prayer:

To shepherds, watching their sheep through the long, dark night, He comes with the glory of the angels' song and in the humility of the manger.

Loving God, we pray for our community...

In the midst of our everyday lives, surprise us with glimpses of the glorious, humble love at the heart of existence. AMEN

(From the Methodist Worship Book, Holy Communion for Christmas and Epiphany)

- Rev John Barnett

Image: shepherds near Nazareth, 2011 (photo from Canadian Mennonites website).