

The beauty of the Christmas story is its simplicity. God trusts a carpenter to raise the Son of God. Mary, probably a teenager, brings new life into the world. A choir of angels sing praises to God. The Shepherds, one of the lowliest occupations of the time, are chosen to be the first messengers of the good news.

None of the elements of the nativity story show any form of glitz or glamour that would come with a king being born. Jesus was in the line of a royal family, yet God used all meager players to bring the light into the world.

Imagine what would've happened if God first revealed himself to the Pharisees or the Sadducees. Jesus would've been hoarded away for only one group of people, the Jews, instead of all people. Or, the miraculous parts of the story would've been explained away or debunked. The Sadducees didn't believe in the existence of spirits, so they wouldn't have gotten past the angel armies.

The angels were an important part to the story to confirm the message to the shepherds. They had not seen anything like this before; that's why they were terrified. It was all new to them. But, they didn't let their minds explain things away. They believed right there in this sacred moment and were compelled to go experience the birth of Christ for themselves.

The shepherds were busy living their everyday lives and then God unexpectedly breaks in. They had to go see this thing that just happened, the thing that will change their lives, the thing that will change the world.

The shepherds and the angels are completely different from each other -- polar

opposites. The shepherds were poor, lived outside in the harsh elements, and probably lived a mundane life...with the exception of scaring off a predatory animal. They were often removed physically from society, out on the pastoral landscapes. They were considered outsiders, living on the margins of society.

The angels were supernatural beings, full of singing, light, and mystery. They were God's messengers bringing assurances of God's love and care. In the nativity story, the angels remind the shepherds that there's a reality beyond what they can see. There is more to life than the physical, mundane elements they can explain and have experienced. And, most importantly, there's a God who loves them despite their lowly position.

On that first Christmas and even today, God is in the miraculous and the mundane. The physical and spiritual world come together in the birth of the Christ child. We are whole when all aspects of our lives come together, trusting in the gifts the Christ child brings. The gifts of light in our darkness, truth in a confusing and complicated world, grace in its most simplistic form.

God sent the shepherds and angels to confirm that God is with us. When God breaks in to our daily lives sometimes its miraculous and stops us in our tracks. Other times, the God moments are easy to overlook or explain away. God is with us, nevertheless, and wants to be with us, this Christmas and every day. Christ wants to be born in us and wants to bring us the gifts we most need. It's rather simple.

I will close with a Christmas blessing:

“Like a tender child in your arms,  
    may the nearness of God warm you.  
Like the awe of the shepherds,  
    may the love that unites us all enfold  
you.  
Like the song of the angels,  
    may the promise of our belovedness  
give you hope.  
Like the wonder of Mary and Joseph,  
    may God's presence awaken us to  
our siblings in the poor.  
Like the radiance of the star over  
Bethlehem,  
    may the light of God's love shine in  
you,  
    give light to those who sit in  
darkness and the shadow of death,  
    and guide your feet into the way of  
peace.

Christ is born. God is with us. Amen.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Garnaas-Holmes,  
<https://www.unfoldinglight.net/reflections?month=12-2018>