

A baby was born to a young couple far from home
Present with a family that took them in to their family living space and made space for them
Attended by love and care from the midwives and women of the village
News spread about the birth, much as it does today—as people shared with others the news
Babies bring a warmth to life and a smile and we delight in sharing the news with others

But in this particular case, God did something unique
Rather than leaving the news up to the random sharing from one person to another
God announced the birth of this baby—Jesus—the son of God, the Messiah

Scripture tells us that shepherds were in the fields, keeping watch over their flock
Outside of Bethlehem is an area known as the Shepherd's Field
There are caves in the area where people could get out of the weather
Shepherds keep their flocks in these fields when at home—even today
Other times they take the sheep out into the hills to graze
Scholars assume that the shepherds were in this area outside of Bethlehem, watching their sheep
Shepherds were poor and deemed unclean by the Jewish faith
They were generally uneducated and considered a low class of people

*Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them,
and they were terrified. Luke 2:9 NRSV*

Like Zechariah, Mary, and Joseph before them, the shepherds were afraid—understandably afraid
Again, the first thing the angel did was to reassure them, “Fear not! Do not be afraid!”
Consistently we are invited to trust the appearance of the Divine Presence in our midst

But then the angel went on with this amazing good news...

*"Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the
people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, 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." Luke 2:10-12 NRSV*

The first people to whom God announced the birth of Jesus—were outcast and rejected
God didn't leave the announcement of Jesus' birth up to word of mouth
He sent angels! But he sent them to the lowest of the low in society
The angel said that the baby born was the Messiah, whom all faithful Jews anticipated
The Messiah has been born as a baby
This incredible good news came to the shepherds

Not only did the angel come with good news for the outcast, but he invited them to visit Jesus
For a shepherd to visit the Messiah would be unthinkable—a breach of etiquette
Normally, they would be told, “Unclean shepherds—be gone!”
Yet, the angels had told them to go see the baby—Would they really be welcome?
The angels anticipated their question and told them the baby was swaddled
Just like every peasant new born child—and their own babies at birth
AND the baby would be “lying in a manger”
While this seems strange to us and sounds like giving birth in a barn
The manger was at one end of the common family living room
A place where the family cow could eat at night—clean by day
Likely a comfortable and common bed for tiny babies—at hand and safe

It would have communicated to the shepherds something about what to expect
The home where the baby is born was a common peasant home like theirs
Maybe they would be welcome after all!

And so they went, finding everything as the angels had said
What Scripture doesn't say explicitly, but must be understood in that culture of honor
Is that Mary and Joseph were not alone in a stable with only animals around
But that Mary and the baby are well cared for in a home like theirs
With loved ones gathered around tending to their needs
If they had been found in dire circumstances such as alone in a stable
The shepherds would have felt honor bound to take them to their home
They would have gathered their families around them to care for their needs

The shepherds left, praising God for all they had seen
As the first evangelists—they told everyone their story
God had come to them with this incredible good news that was for them—the rejected

Jesus was born for the lowly outcast and rejected of society, but also for the rich and wise of society
In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."
Matthew 2:1-2 NRSV

God also sent a message to wise men from the East who came with gold, frankincense, and myrrh
The first announcement God sent out about the birth was to outcast Jews
The second announcement from God was to wealthy Gentiles

The wise men were likely Arabs from east of the Jordan River in Arabia
They brought gifts for this baby, born king of the Jews
Gold—which is mined in Arabia
Frankincense and Myrrh—both are harvested from trees growing in Arabia
They followed and studied the planets and stars

Not knowing where to find the child, they went to Jerusalem, the capitol city and asked questions
King Herod was frightened at the search for a king—as was all of Jerusalem
Herod because he was paranoid, even killing his wife and sons out of fear
Jerusalem because of the terror they lived under with a paranoid king
Herod called in the chief priests and scribes and asked where the Messiah was to be born
They said Bethlehem according to the prophets
Herod sent the wise men on, asking that they return with the exact location

The wise men went to Bethlehem, found the child in the house where the baby was living
We aren't told the time of the visit—presumably the child is not yet old enough to travel
The young family is still in Bethlehem and hasn't returned home to Nazareth
It was in Nazareth that Mary and Joseph raised Jesus

Overwhelmed with joy, the wise men enter the house and see the baby Jesus
They paid him homage and offered him the gifts they had brought with them

Having been warned in a dream of Herod's true intentions, they returned home a different way
Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Egypt and lived as refugees until Herod died
At which time they returned home to Nazareth

God comes to everyone—the lowly peasant doing work considered unclean and unworthy to see a king
And to the wealthy, wise men—well educated, but of a different race and religion

God comes to everyone today
To today's outcast—to those caught in poverty, living under a bridge
To today's wealthy—to the heads of corporations and billionaires
To us! All of us!

It's an invitation to trust the present God in our midst
It's an opportunity to welcome God into our daily lives
To Listen and follow the Leadings
To share the good news with others
To gratefully notice and worship God wherever God shows up!