

Saturday, 24 December 2022  
Carols for Christmas Eve (Family Service)  
The Rev'd Dr Mariama Ifode-Blease  
**'What's the good news?'**

**May I speak in the name of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

**Amen.**

Good evening, everyone. I am Sharon, the chief shepherdess. My friends call me Shazza. Now you all look pretty friendly to me, so please do call me Shazza.

As I am going to tell you a story, I'm going to check that you're listening and not too distracted by the noise from the surrounding fields and dirt tracks. So, when I say:

*Something is happening. Something has changed!*

You say: **Hey Shazza! What's the good news?**

Well, what a journey! I have finally arrived in this part of the world. It's a long way, you know, from the hill country where I left my sheep. You see, the strangest thing happened a little while ago. I was with my friends watching the sheep. The sheep sometimes do a lot, and sometimes they just sit there waiting for the world to change around them. Some sheep get into all sorts of trouble, fighting with other sheep for bits of land that neither sheep truly owns; arguing with their sister and brother sheep because one feels better than the other. Some sheep also fight to get my attention, crying wolf. Other sheep refuse to stay in the field where I can look after them and make sure that they are safe. There are some sheep that tell lies about other sheep, and we know that that is not very nice.

And there are those sheep who single out some of the other sheep to make them feel bad, because that sheep has a leg that doesn't quite look the same as the others, or an eye that's not quite the same, or a back that's a little bit odd to some sheep. Some sheep also single out the black sheep, and the brown ones. I tell you; it can be so hard looking after sheep! I wouldn't recommend it!

So, there I was, with my friends and we were thinking just how tiring being a shepherdess can be when, all of a sudden, there were some very bright lights in the sky.

*Something is happening. Something has changed!*

**Hey Shazza! What's the good news?**

Well, I don't believe in things that I cannot see, you see. I am a very practical and scientific shepherdess. But something *was* happening, and something had changed. In the sky above

us, there was an angel. And then there were tens of them! The first one was a bit of a chatter box, really, and started to say all sorts of things, about the good news, about this and about that. Something about a baby being born a bit of a way away. Well, I said, any baby born is good news. What's all this noise about? Because children are a great gift and should be celebrated at every opportunity.

The angel gave me a bit of a look and explained that this baby was very special. This baby was God in human form. What?! I said. I am having none of that nonsense. We are shepheresses, honest folk, not interested in followers, or thumbs up, or how many people wave and say that they like us!

But, as I listened to the angel, I realised that it was not about how popular I was, or my friends were, or how popular you are, or whether you are wearing the right clothes, (I certainly wasn't) or how much money you or your family has, or the type of hut you live in. God, the angel said, has come to earth as a child, as a baby, so that God could grow and share in all that we live as human beings.

Isn't that amazing?

*Something is happening. Something has changed!*

**Hey Shazza! What's the good news?**

Well, it's pretty hard to believe. I mean, I am a nobody really. Not a king, a queen or a princess. Just me, little old me, Shazza the chief shepherdess. I mean, who is going to believe this story. Who is going to believe me, and that I was there? I mean, I practically abandoned my sheep to see the unbelievable sight. I mean, I arrived and there she was, this woman, with the donkey and other animals, and this baby in the manger. Where was the food, I thought (because I would be hungry after her ordeal). Where was the nurse to help with this situation? And the towels and the blankets? And where was the bath? There was none of that. But there was this amazing sense of peace, and some joy, and quite a bit of laughter. I think that they were laughing because they had survived.

The baby smiled when I came into the stable. I think it was because a lamb ran in with me. This child was important not just for me to see, but for the world too. This child, I kept hearing the words of the angel, as God with us, was showing that I could be myself with God. Like a baby is totally themselves. I can shout and scream, and I can be really, *really* angry, and cry and laugh, and God would still be there. God would still listen. Because we matter to God. You matter to God. And I matter to God too.

*Something really is happening. Something has changed!*

**Hey Shazza! What's the good news?**

Well, I watched the mother hold the baby and feed him. I watched the baby make those baby noises and the father there wrapping him a bit more tightly. It gets really cold at night.

Just because I live in a hot country doesn't mean it doesn't get cold, you know. And it gets really dark too. That's why I need my boots and staff, to make sure I don't fall over during the night. So anyway, I saw how this mother held her baby so tenderly, and she showed real love. And I thought: how much must God love me? Because I could see God, and I could see love, right there, in her arms. And I thought, wait a minute,

*Something is happening. Something has changed!*

**Hey Shazza! What's the good news?**

The good news is that God is here. *God is here*. In your hut and in my hut. When things are really happy and when things are really sad. The good news is that God knows you. And the really good news is that God celebrates you, just as you are.

*Something is happening. Something has changed!*

**Hey Shazza! What's the good news?**

The good news is that you are so loved and so held, whether you are a baby or adult. And you are held like a baby in the arms of a loving mother. His name was Jesus. My name is Shazza. God knows your name, and God knows mine, and God is waiting for us to reconnect with God through Jesus as much as we can, in whichever way we know, in our daily lives. You know, seeing that baby, gave me a bit of a spring in my step. I mean, I am 106 years old, but you couldn't tell. But with this birth, with seeing this child, I felt young and alive again. I felt free and seen again. I felt whole and beloved again.

Something *has* happened. Something *will* change. We have the start of a new story. And we are asked to be a part of it.

Blessed be that Child  
Who gladdened Bethlehem today!  
Blessed be the Babe  
Who made humanity young again today!  
(Saint Ephrem the Syrian, d. 373)

**Amen.**