

## Scripture Reflection December 24: God loves Shepherds.



The whole point of scripture reflection is to deepen one's own understanding of our relationship with God. Many people come to the Bible and say it's hard to find God in there. The job of a guide to the Bible is to open up gently new understandings of certain themes which are contained in the vast ancient writings and see if and how they can apply to us today.

One enduring theme of the Bible is that God loves his Creation. This love has been written into the most ancient of writings beginning with Genesis, the first book of the Bible.

As the Bible story is set amongst early pastoralists, many of the heroes are shepherds, We have the first Patriarch Abraham and his descendants who are shepherding nomads. Moses leaves the rich life of the Egyptian court and becomes a shepherd. Amos is a shepherd and becomes a fiery prophet from the south of the country and delivers a far reaching condemnation of social justice abuses perpetrated by his northern neighbours. Of course the most famous shepherd is the shepherd King David, who is writer and poet of many beautiful psalms we have today.

Because God is Spirit and hard for us who live in the material world to understand, various metaphors exist to help us understand the essential nature of God. One of these is that God is like the best of shepherds. Jesus calls himself "The Good Shepherd". People of his day knew that this term meant as they were so dependant on sheep as part of their economy. Sheep in Old Testament times were very different from the Cumbrian sheep we see today in our landscape. These creatures could not even drink water from a stream by themselves. They were led individually by their shepherd to do the most simple of things: Shepherds even build t little stone tables for them to eat their forage from. Sheep looked different too. They had very fat tails to preserve life during hardship times rather like a camel's hump. One thing is sure they needed their shepherd to preserve their life. Jesus looked at the crowd at lake Galilee and reflected that they were like sheep without a shepherd: totally dependant and unable to survive by themselves. We are like that: unable to survive and live life to its fullest without the protection and love of God.

Shepherds in the Bible seemed to be close to God and use the wilderness to listen closely to what he says to them. During Advent can we too put ourselves outside the business of life into the countryside to give time to listen to God talking to us? This is how the theme of shepherding can relate to us today. How do we listen to God?

God chose the shepherds on the hillside to reveal the glorious birth of his son.

Can we at Christmas Join with the shepherds at the side of the manger and just be present, silent and trusting? Who knows what they understood about that evening but it probably was transformative.

"Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to little ones" Matt 11:25

