

Lights, Please

Intro. Shepherds don't have much prominence in scripture. They are mostly in the background of the culture; nomads who moved their herds of sheep and goats to wherever there was grass and water. Twice a year they are center stage in our liturgical celebrations. The second Sunday of Easter is called Good Shepherd Sunday to highlight the image of the Lord personified as the good shepherd in the twenty-third Psalm, guiding his people to food, rest and safety. The other big day for shepherds is Christmas Eve.

I. Like some people today, they were working the night shift on Christmas. They were hoping it was a night like most others night: quiet, no trouble. They had no idea it would be an unforgettable night. They

were out in the weather, making sure the sheep and goats didn't do something stupid like wander away and that no predators killed them. Long, boring hours. That changed dramatically when a bright light suddenly punched a hole in the darkness. A voice said don't be afraid. (If I wasn't afraid before that, I would be. Something is coming, the question is good or bad.) It was glad tidings, news about a baby born in a stable. The shepherds might have thought, "Okay. It probably happens a lot." But this baby is unlike any other: he is the Christ, the Anointed, the Messiah. The light got brighter, and more heavenly beings appeared, singing, "Glory to God." After all that, their curiosity was aroused, and they went to see. Luke wrote that shepherds were the first to hear about and see the Christ child. The Light came to them first. Shepherds travel the

country looking for the best places to pasture their flocks. What a great choice to spread the **light of Christ**. They would tell their families, who would tell the person who bought their sheep and goats. And the **light** would be passed on. He would tell the butcher who would tell the shopkeeper. The **light** is handed to others. She would tell the women who bought the meat. The **light** of Christ's birth would enter hundreds of homes.

Concl. What a way to deliver the Good News. Two weeks ago and just this afternoon, our parish celebrated the birth of three babies in the sacrament of Baptism. A lighted candle was given to parents and godparents to hold for the children until they are old enough to carry the Light of Christ themselves. We have the same light from that first Christmas in us. If there is a candle in your pew, please pick it up.

We are not supposed to keep the light for ourselves.
We are to share it with each other. *We* are the light that shines in the darkness. *We* can diminish the darkness of war, injustice and poverty by sharing the Good News of Christ. One writer put it this way:
We are to be “contagious lights which bring a ray of light in the thick of the night. {Keep lighting candles.} The light is not at the end of the tunnel; it is in the tunnel itself, in the people journeying through it.” Break through the tunnel into the wide-open world to welcome the Prince of Peace.
[G. Gutiérrez, *Sharing the Word Through the Liturgical Year*, p. 26, Orbis, 1997] **We can banish the darkness of fear, war and injustice. Be the light.**

Fr. Michael Pendergraft, Christmas, 2022