

Silently under stars above,
a woman's new born love
held to her skin,
the wonder of life begins.

Animals dumb witnesses of grace -
a miracle in the place
where they would eat.

The Lord of all life asleep,
lying in his mother's arms,
dependent, needing fed -
God - within this shed.

Shepherds saw, drawn by heavenly skies,
the truth through peasant eyes;
veiled in the skin,
the glory of God within.

Glory and peace - the angels sing
of truths they can't take in;
and we won't believe
a God who is clothed in skin,

and in our form -
and our lives adorn
with honour and with pride -
God 'on the inside'.

Not for him, to claim the crown his own -
the emblems of his throne;
stripped in his birth,
of all but the life of earth.

Not for him the robes of royalty -
a splendour you could see;
trading it in
for the dignity of a skin.

And in our race
he takes a place
right inside our skin
- when God became our kin.

That's it, isn't it? – God as one of our relatives! – totally mind-
blowing! And today is when we face the **meaning** for us of
what happened in Bethlehem.

Imagine it - the shepherds are out guarding their flock. Suddenly the sky lights up and the night isn't scary any more –only it probably is because a whole host of angels and the glory of the Lord shining all around you probably is a bit scary at least first time round! What does it all mean?!

The shepherds rush through the dark night to the stable and there is the baby just as the angels had told them. Instinctively, as we would do, they kneel down to peer at the baby – to try to make eye-contact.

There is a lovely old prayer for Christmas Day that speaks of that mutual eye-contact:

Blessed art thou, O Christmas Christ, that thy cradle was so low, that shepherds, poorest and simplest of earthly folk, could yet kneel beside it, and look level-eyed into the face of God.

And that is what happens to those awe-struck shepherds, they literally look level-eyed into the face of God. We know, and we are known.

The Christmas story says that ***we matter*** – despite our worst and most paranoid fears - ***our lives are full of meaning*** – and we know this because the most high God has come amongst us as a baby who can return our gaze.

You see, those late-night, worst fears ***are*** groundless: God has not turned his back on us, nor ever will. At the times

when he appears to have gone away and left us he has not abandoned us. Rather, he is so close-to that he has blended-in with us and amongst us – so that he is no longer ‘the other’. And that is surely Good News; that we are never abandoned, and always cherished by a God who meets us eye-to-eye.

So if today the world feels a better place because God has not abandoned us, then we surely must have particular concern for those who **do** feel abandoned.

What’s it like? Well – three little pictures: There’s the man who suddenly discovers that his benefit has been completely cut for six weeks because he has not understood what he had to do. There is the mother who knows she must move house to prevent an increase in her rent but can find nowhere to move to. There is the elderly person who literally sees nobody for days at a time.

Those whom God has chosen not to abandon cannot be allowed to be abandoned by us.

And I just wonder what would happen if everybody here and in every other church in the land committed themselves to make sure that at least one person felt less abandoned. I wonder what would happen! Well – it will mean that, through us, the Light of Christmas Shines and the aloneness isn’t so scary any more. It’s as though God reaches out and puts his hand in ours – more than that, Christmas reminds us not just that God holds each of us, but that God holds up

those who are abandoned – and that he uses us, and others, to do so. God needs us to be his hands, his feet, his heart of love ...

Almost every Christmas since the beginning of the Second World War preachers have remembered the words used by King George VI on the first Christmas of the Second World War:

*And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:
“Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.”*

And he replied:

“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”

Will you allow God to use your hands and heart to show his love?

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