



O Come, O Come

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

There were some shepherds living in the same part of the country, keeping guard throughout the night over their flocks in the open fields. Suddenly an angel of the Lord stood by their side... When the angels left them and went back into Heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Now let us go straight to Bethlehem and see this thing which the Lord has made known to us."

Luke 2:8-9a, 15 (Phillips)

By and large, life is fairly ordinary. We go about our days doing our jobs, whether that's in an office or a factory or a lab, be it ferrying kids around or sitting in front of our devices at home. And while we might wish for a little excitement now and again, the reality is we're okay with comfortable routine.

The Christmas season comes into that comfortable routine as something of an intrusion. There is still a job to go to or the usual cooking and cleaning that must be done. And now on top of that there are a plethora of activities and baking and extra shopping. The fizz and excitement of the season can leap onto the stage of life and grab hold of our attention—or muck up our schedule and annoy us with all the bother.



In a way, this is a little like what happened to the shepherds. They were going about their jobs, working the night shift. Then WHAM! Glory breaks in. They could have been really irked that this pesky angel showed up—no doubt scaring the sheep as much as the shepherds—and had the temerity to suggest they walk a mile or more...into town...in the middle of the night...to look for a baby. Seriously?!

It's easy to find ourselves annoyed when God interrupts our routine. I have my "spirituality" schedule: daily quiet times, weekly prayer meetings, sabbath, church services. I could go through it like an automaton, just ticking the boxes. It's all meaningful and sometimes quite rich. But even so, it can be pretty mundane.

Thus, it can come as a not entirely pleasant surprise when God taps me on the shoulder and says something like, "Read that verse again. Now do something about it." And He might not ask me to do something as simple as look for a baby. He might ask me to forgive someone I see as an enemy or give grace to people with whom I disagree or have patience (or even joy!) in a situation I'd rather just grouse about.

And yet...glory. God comes to us in glory. His interruptions are never trivial. He always wants to tell us something that will change our lives forever if we just listen, if we just believe, if we just act. The shepherds could have stayed in the fields, parsed the angels' words, and mulled over what they might mean. Instead, they acted on the message God gave them, and they found Jesus.

Like the shepherds, I want not just to receive God's words but to embrace them. Yes, that might come as an interruption. It might be inconvenient or uncomfortable, but I want to take it in and move forward in whatever He has to say to me because every interruption can bring me closer to Christ.



How has God interrupted my life recently?

What can I do today to place or keep my heart in the best position to respond to God's interruptions?

Exercise:

1. Commit this time to God, asking Him to speak to you throughout this exercise.
2. Read the passage.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

Luke 2:8-15 (NIV)

3. Now read the passage below which includes prompts to help you imagine yourself there with the shepherds. As you allow your imagination to create the scene, pay attention to the details: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings.

⁸ *...there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.*

Imagine you are among these shepherds. It's deep in the night. Feel the cold air in your nostrils, on your skin. Hear the sounds of the night creatures: crickets, perhaps owls, maybe the howl of a wolf in the distance. Smell the grass and even the scent of the sheep. What other sounds and scents do you detect? What can you see by the light of the moon and stars? Are the other shepherds nearby, or are you alone? How do you feel about being here?

⁹ *An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.*

Suddenly a huge being surrounded by blazing light appears before you! The light is so bright you can't bear to look. Every sound—the sheep, the crickets, even the faint rustle of wind through the trees—has ceased. As if the world is encased in total silence. Then a booming voice fills the air.

¹⁰ *...the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid.*

Your heart is pounding, and you're faced with a terrifying creature outside the boundaries of anything you ever could have imagined. Yet with these words, you grow calm. You know in the depths of your soul that this being speaks truth. You need not fear.

I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.
¹¹ *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

A savior? The Messiah! Can it be? You've heard stories your whole life about a

messiah coming. Is it possible He has finally come in your lifetime? But this being speaks the words of God. It *has* to be true! What emotions arise in you?

¹³ *Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,*

¹⁴ *“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

The skies, from end to end, are filled with creatures unlike any you’ve ever seen: wings and eyes and colors. The faces of strange creatures all upturned and joyous. Arms raised in praise, mouths wide in jubilant song. It’s a party, it’s a dance, and you’ve been invited! And you join in. Hear the uproarious songs of praise, feel the wind of their rushing wings against your skin. How do you respond?

And suddenly—as suddenly as it began—it’s over. The skies are simply filled with stars again. The air holds the sounds of crickets, not the praises of the heavenly host. You can feel a light breeze on your face rather than the gale of angel wings. Was it a dream? You look at the other shepherds. They’re gazing around as astonished as you are. No, not a dream then.

¹⁵ *When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”*

You and your companions head to Bethlehem. Yet a part of your mind is still listening for angel voices. God has spoken to you, and He wants to continue speaking to you. As you walk toward the Christ child, what is God saying to you? And how do you respond? Talk with God as with a friend you trust, in a very close and intimate way. Let the conversation continue as long as it needs to.

4. When you’ve finished your conversation with God, journal about the experience, your prayer, your conversation.
 - Note anything that struck you, especially the unusual or unexpected. Ask yourself:
 - Why did I feel or think or react the way I did?
 - Does what stood out to me show me anything about the way I see God, myself, or others?
 - Note any desires or concerns that have come up as a result of this prayer.
 - What, if anything, did God show you?
 - Did God give you what you desired from Him in this time? If not, why?