

Good news? The Shepherds and finding peace in the panic of pandemic.

Luke 2:15

This year for Advent we are using the helpful notes produced by Spurgeon's Children's Charity. We will be following the themes of peace, unity, hope and love in the midst of on-line Christingle and a nativity scene.

Today's theme is Finding peace in the panic of pandemic

The notes begin with what we all know - we've seen little good news. As Covid-19 tore across the globe, it brought with it fear, anxiety, isolation and in many cases sadly, death. This unseen killer forced our churches to close, robbed us of physical interaction, companionship and relationship. It has been a year of events in which many of us have struggled to see the good. It has been a year of tremendous change and hardship, and we have had to adapt both personally and within the church.

I want to put on record my thanks especially to Eric, Craig and Susan for enabling our on-line services to occur, develop be a focal point for church. The weekly delivery of the news letter has also been hard work but worth it for keeping everyone in contact with the life of the church.

But I also want to thank each of you for adjusting and adapting so well to the new order of things. It's not been easy!

But just as we have had to cope with unprecedented change, so, too, the shepherds. They were minding their own business when a cataclysmic event interrupted their normality.

The shepherds faced many challenges, from the immediate dangers of wolves, lions or bears, to the risk of sheep wandering from the flock and getting themselves into danger. Sheep were important in biblical times as their lambs were used in the temple as sacrifices for sins, and for the lamb to be used it had to be in perfect condition. The shepherds' livelihood relied on keeping their sheep, and lambs, safe and well.

It is suggested that the shepherds mentioned in Luke were the type of shepherds that raised lambs specifically for the temple. When a lamb was due to be born, they would prepare a place for the ewe to give birth and when the lamb was born they wrapped it in strips of cloth called swaddling.

And so, that first Christmas night, when the angels appeared, the shepherds were terrified! It had been 400 years since God had spoken to His chosen people, the Jews; there would not have been anyone in the temple that could have predicted, let alone expected, that the announcement of Jesus' birth would happen in a field, to a group of shepherds. On hearing the news, they didn't think twice, they went directly to Bethlehem to see Jesus for themselves.

The announcement spurred them to action.

When we first heard of the pandemic many of us were spurred into action, for some of us it meant stocking up on essentials at the supermarket, buying a year's-worth of toilet rolls in one go; for others it was ordering masks, hand gels and anti-bac online. And for others still, it was shopping for vulnerable family members in preparation. The announcement spurred us to action, our whole world was turned upside down and what followed has not been easy or painless. However, within the isolation, many of us have found new closeness with God. In years gone by, we have filled every spare minute with busyness but this enforced slowing down has enabled us to build a closer relationship with God, and to rely on Him more for each day. The shepherds went quickly to find Jesus in a manger, but when they got there, they stopped, knelt and worshipped Him. In the chaos of the evening's announcement, where their world was turned upside down, they were brought to their knees to spend time with Jesus.

And through it all, God hasn't left us, He hasn't ceased to love us; the good news we share at Christmas of His birth is still the good news of the gospel. He is still Immanuel - God with us.

Prayer: Father God, thank you for the gift of your son who came into the world to save us. Thank you that through Him we see your love, your character and your heart of love for us. Help us, Lord, not to keep this love story to ourselves.

Inspire us with new ways to communicate with our communities, so that they may know you and, please, deepen our walk with you.

Lord Jesus we thank you that, even though this year has been tough, you never left our side. Thank you that, even though we walked through the 'valley of the shadow of death', we don't have to fear because you are with us. Thank you for your peace.

In Jesus name, Amen

About Spurgeons Children's Charity



Through the delivery of support and intervention services, and by speaking up on behalf of those who need them most, Spurgeons give vulnerable children and families the chance for a better future.

In the year up to the end of March 2020, Spurgeons ran 50 projects and services which were delivered in 22 Local Authority areas across England.

This brought them into contact with 29,835 children and young people and 33,232 adult family members. Of these, they worked intensively with 3,095 children and young people to directly help them overcome the challenges they faced and reduced their vulnerability and disadvantage.

Children's Centres

Our Children's Centres offer support to any parent with a young family, providing spaces where we can tailor training, support and play sessions for families to thrive. At the heart of the community, our centres are known for caring, non-judgmental and practical support that is open to all families regardless of their background situation.

Over the lockdown months our Children's Centres have been actively checking in on vulnerable families by phone, providing fun sessions for children online, and have provided practical support for the families that we serve. Staff have also done many socially distanced doorstep visits to support families.

Please pray for our Children's Centres this Christmas. Some of the children that would attend our groups will be from families that cannot afford to buy presents. Pray that we do our very best to make sure each child receives a gift this year, and that each family receives the love and support they need.

Together for Families

Our Together for Families project aims to empower local churches to expand their services, to stand in the gap and support isolated and vulnerable families. We would value your partnership with us in prayer this Christmas, praying for our team that supports churches in making connections with vulnerable children. Please pray that we will have wisdom and that God will open doors for us to offer the best care we can.

Young Carers

There are an estimated 800,000 young carers across the UK who take on extra responsibilities when caring for close relatives and loved ones. Dispensing medication, doing the weekly shop, taking care of the washing, ironing and childcare are just some of the tasks taken on by children. Imagine then, the added stress and isolation that Covid-19 has brought to many of their lives, as well as the worry of shielding their vulnerable loved ones from further sickness or injury. Many children have become even more overwhelmed as support groups and meeting with friends has been restricted during lockdown. Our Young Carer projects across the UK are providing services and support to some of these children, giving them the space they need to be a child. By providing whole family support, and space to listen, we are helping relieve the pressure felt by young carers across the country and letting them know they are not alone