

St Marc Grenoble
Christmas Carol Service
Saturday, 18th December 2021
'Christmas Choice'

For many of us, I'm sure Christmas no longer holds the same excitement as when we were younger.

For a moment, cast your mind back and remember the joy and anticipation with which you approached Christmas in childhood. I'm sure it was very different, far less materialistic than for today's children. Nevertheless, I'm sure, for many, it was a time of real excitement.

But the first Christmas was totally different.

The Jewish people had been awaiting Messiah for hundreds of years. Isaiah's prophecy was around 750 years earlier, and for 400 years, since Malachi's prophecy, God had been silent.

Every Jewish woman still hoped that she would bear the Messiah, yet the excitement of anticipation had dimmed.

Then, almost without warning, a group of shepherds camped out on a hillside outside Bethlehem, received a huge surprise.

Completely unannounced, an angel appeared and "The glory of the Lord shone around them." They were dazzled – stunned – and terrified. Not surprising, is it?

Shepherds lived on the margins of society. They were despised, and trusted so little that they were not even allowed to give evidence in court. Yet, ironically, their main role was providing animals for the temple sacrifices.

People probably treated them how we treat the apparently homeless people on the streets of any town, begging with their dogs. It was easier just to pretend they weren't there.

But, it was to these outcasts that God chose to make the first announcement of Jesus' birth.

They reacted immediately. "They hurried off and found Mary, Joseph, and the baby, lying in the manger." A most unlikely place to find the Son of God.

The shepherds – still in shock – were delighted to find Jesus – and "They returned glorifying and Praising God."

Having found Him, we're told "They spread the word about what they'd been told about this child." For them, it was a life changing experience.

What a contrast to the way the Jewish authorities received the news!

When the Magi came looking for the new king born in Israel, Herod was immediately disturbed – he too was frightened. But not for the same reason..

He also wanted to find the baby. But, unlike the shepherds, he didn't want to worship Jesus, he wanted to kill Him, so there was no threat to his position.

The establishment failed to kill Jesus before He changed the future of the world. But, Herod managed to destroy many innocent children in a cruel act of genocide, attempting to protect his own shaky power.

The Jewish people had waited hundreds of years for the Messiah. They expected a powerful bellicose leader. But, when He came, He wasn't what they'd expected, Jesus spoke of love and forgiveness. Many failed to recognise Him, or to claim His salvation.

Jesus wanted to change lives from within. He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" and offered the promise of eternal life. But, most weren't ready for the change Jesus offered. They chose to reject and, eventually, kill Him.

Jesus' death was the ultimate sacrifice, which paid for the redemption of the world; and His resurrection guarantees the promise of eternal life.

So, this Christmas time each one of us has a simple choice:

We can be like Herod, and the Judean establishment, and reject Jesus.

If we reject Him, we'll live with the continuing burden of bitterness and pain.

Or we can be like the shepherds, and welcome Jesus into our lives, allowing Him to change us, ready for eternity.

We can claim His promise of peace and joy, and look forward to eternal life with Him.

**Remember – this Christmas time, the Choice is yours alone.
I pray you'll have a very Happy Christmas**