

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

THE SHEPHERDS

EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY'S THEME

Introducing the Gospel

Nativity (Luke 2: 1-14)

Luke's account of the nativity locates Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and identifies that location with David the shepherd boy whom Samuel anointed as king. As the birth narrative unfolds, Luke proceeds to give prominence to the shepherds. The birth of Jesus went neither unnoticed nor uncelebrated, because the shepherds were there to pay homage. In the Christmas tradition the shepherds have come to represent the ordinary people of first century Palestine, the people whose lives the Saviour was born to change.

The image to stimulate reflection on Luke's account of the birth of Jesus is *the shepherds*.

Core extract from the Gospel (Luke 2: 8-11; for reflection throughout the week)

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields,
keeping watch over their flock by night.
Then an angel of the Lord stood before them,
and the glory of the Lord shone around them,
and they were terrified.
But the angel said to them,
'Do not be afraid; for see –
I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:
to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour,
who is the Messiah, the Lord.'

Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)

Lord Jesus Christ,
the shepherds rejoiced at your birth.
Today you invite us to join
with the shepherds in celebration.
Accept the praise of our hearts,
as we offer ourselves in your service;
this Christmastide and always.
Amen.

READING NEXT SUNDAY'S GOSPEL

Luke 2: 1-14

The Birth of Jesus

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

ENGAGING WITH THE THEME

Dwelling with the text (Luke 2: 1-14)

Begin to explore Luke's account of the birth of Jesus by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

- What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
- What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
- What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
- What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

Thinking and talking

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- What significance do you attach to Bethlehem?
- What significance do you attach to Jesus' birth in the stable?
- How do you understand the role of the shepherds?
- How do you understand the role of the heavenly host?
- What does this narrative say for us today?

Using your Bible

Explore the significance of David as the shepherd boy anointed as king.

- 1 Samuel 16: 1-13

Explore the significance of David in Jesus' lineage.

- Matthew 1: 6-16
- Luke 1: 26-27

Explore the significance of Bethlehem.

- Micah 5: 2
- Matthew 2: 1

Explore the significance of status and power in Luke's Gospel.

- Luke 1: 46-53

Explore echoes of the angelic chorus.

- Psalm 148: 1-2
- Isaiah 9: 6-7

CHRISTMAS DAY (YEAR A) Thursday 25 December 2025

Exploring online

Widen your exploration of Luke's account of the birth of Jesus by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

- Shepherds at the time of Jesus' birth
- Christmas in Luke's Gospel
- Shepherds today

Drawing on experience

The image to stimulate reflection on Luke's account of the birth of Jesus is *the shepherds*. Draw on your experience of shepherds. For example:

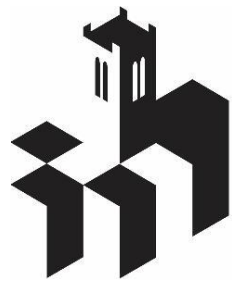
- What experience have you had of shepherds today in real life?
- What do you recall about shepherds in nativity plays?
- What do you recall about shepherds in the Bible?

What have you learned about the shepherds?

Creating and making

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by Luke's account of the birth of Jesus or by the image of shepherds.

- Create a collage of pictures of shepherds today from across the world.
- Dress clothes dummies as shepherds.
- Make a crib scene with plenty of sheep and shepherds.
- Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of Luke's account of the birth of Jesus or on the image of the shepherds.



**Liverpool
Cathedral**

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Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel. We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary's Centre in Wales.



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