

These evenings we have been focusing on one particular aspect of the story of Christmas and we had it read to us in Chinese tonight. You will not all have been able to follow that of course but I hope you are following it in the English translation that was that was given there. It's that section of the story where the shepherds in the fields in the hills around Bethlehem about six miles away from Jerusalem are keeping watch over their flocks by night. And suddenly unexpectedly out of the blue, literally, all heaven breaks loose the angel of the Lord appears to them, the glory of the Lord shines around them and they're filled with great fear. It is a God event takes place. A God event of mega proportions similar to what had happened previously in the history of Israel. And it happens to a group of ordinary people shepherds looking after their flocks by night. It's to these shepherds it's the good news. Message is given that there is this baby born in the City of David the city of Bethlehem and they'll find him there very ordinary circumstances. But here's the deal. This is going to bring great glory to God and it's going to bring peace to people.

Now the fact that these were shepherds, and the fact that it was Bethlehem, raises a question for us, or two questions actually: why Bethlehem and why Shepherds? Why Bethlehem is easy to answer because one of the great prophets of Israel has said "You Bethlehem, though you're small among the clans of Judah, to you will come a ruler" and he goes on to say "that ruler shall stand and shall shepherd his flock". It says more about that ruler it says about this ruler that he is from eternity and yet although he is from eternity, has always existed, he will be born of a woman. You find similar kind of language in a prophet contemporaneous with Micah whose name was Isaiah and in Chapter 40 of Isaiah he comes with a message, God sends him with a message of comfort and of peace to the to the troubled people of God comfort "comfort my people speak tenderly to Jerusalem cry to her that her warfare is ended" that is peace has broken out and it's broken out because her iniquity has been pardoned. And how is this going to happen? Well as that chapter unfolds we hear these words: "behold, the Lord God comes, the Lord God comes himself". And what is it going to do? He is going to tend his flock like a shepherd.

He is going to gather the lambs in his arms. He will carry them close to himself and he will gently lead those who are with young. It staggers the mind of the prophet just as it staggered the mind of these shepherds that the Lord God the one who exists in the glory and the highest, in Isaiah chapter 40 the one who measured out, created reality the universe measured out the way a workman comes when he is going to do some work in your house and he brings his measuring tape and he measures out what he is going to do before he starts to do it. God measured out the universe. Isaiah says God himself is measureless. God challenges people. Can you can you know what's in my mind. Do you know what I am going to do next. Could you even begin to to work out what I am doing in history. Do you have any idea at all how great God

is. And yet here is the miracle. That when they're told when the shepherds are told that this God who is glorious is coming to visit his people, when Isaiah says "the Lord God comes", the shepherds were expecting something equivalent to that first outburst of glory and the highest. But when they went to Bethlehem they found a baby.

Here's the mystery of Christmas: do you know that at Christmas time we are considering the highest, the highest theological concepts that Christians ever think about and what we want is them packaged in a nice little way that makes us feel good. Well I can actually only tell you stuff that will give you a headache, if I am being faithful. How does God who is everywhere all the time present come to us in the form of a baby? He takes on our humanity. He joins it to himself without either bleeding over into the other. The baby remains a human baby. He does not have God powers. Later on you perform miracles. He'll do that in the power of the Holy Spirit. He is filled with the Holy Spirit as a man, but as a little baby he doesn't have God powers. He isn't a grown up looking out at the world; he is a baby. He grows up in favor with God and with man. He develops as any human being develops and as he develops his relationship with God as a human being develops, yet at the same time, at the same time, he is holding everything that exists in place. It's remarkable isn't it. We're asking you to believe the remarkable. The unbelievable, the inconceivable. Yet that's what we affirm. One Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God with two natures: divine and human. He comes to be the human being we are not. He comes to be the human being we fail to be which is why we failed one another. We hurt one another, we break each other's hearts. We disappoint ourselves as well as disappointing those who give us. He comes to be that human being that does not disappoint. To act in our place, to obey where we disobey, to please where we displease, and he does it in our place as our representative, as our substitute. And not only that he takes on himself all of our guilt and our failures and our broken promises, he takes all of that, and he takes the blame for all of that in our place. How can a human being do that? Answer: Because he is the God man. His divine nature helps him to absorb your guilt, my guilt. His divine nature helps him to endure the penalty for our sin. His divine nature strengthens him in the task of being the truly human person, and he does that so that you and I can not only have our sins forgiven, that's a great thing, but increasingly, that you and I might become more human. Human again. Delivered from merely animal instincts. Delivered from merely satisfying being at the mercy of our appetites whether for food or drink or whatever it might be. Delivering us from that and renewing us and making us the kind of strong human beings God intended us to be and one day sharing in the very life of the divine, the very life of God himself – eternal life.

The shepherds didn't get all of that theology in their minds but they did know this: They'd seen a vision of the glory of God and that was great. And they'd seen a little baby and the angel had taught them to put both together in their heads. And if you get nothing else out of

this evening put them both together in your head. And do what the angels did, and do what Mary and Joseph were doing, and worship him. Worship him, and receive him, and go away like the shepherds, excited, and telling everybody they could what was told to them. The good news.

Let's pray. Father we pray that you would give us such a grasp of the wonder of what Christmas is about this this mega shift that has ramifications for the furthest parts of outer space, other dimensions we're unfamiliar with and our own personal lives. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.