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'They were terrified.' (Luke 2. 9)

The shepherds, that is. When they saw the angels.

Sorry to be so very 'un-Christmassy', especially on Christmas morning itself. But this little verse from St Luke's account of the Christmas story always gets passed over. But, for me, it is so interesting and so very relevant. For on the one hand we all long for God, for a glimpse of God, for certainty about God, even though we know we can't have it, and on the other, if God does appear, the sort of tectonic plates shifting of whole landscapes, and sharp as flint knowledge of a new reality, it's actually, well... terrifying.

No one can see God and live was an Old Testament truism that is not only undone in Jesus, but turned completely inside out. For not only do we see God, but God as a child, God as one of us.

'Don't be afraid,' say the angels.

'I bring you news of great joy. A child is born. A saviour is given. And this is the sign: a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.'

Maybe the problem with our world today is that because we've stopped being terrified, we can't hear the message anymore.

But now I really am spoiling Christmas. Or maybe bringing it to life. Because we should be terrified.

Terrified of what we're doing to the planet.

Terrified of our inequalities.

Terrified that some of us enjoy so much at Christmas and others have virtually nothing.

Terrified of what this means about who we are, and why we need a saviour.

Which is why - if we can hear the angels, however faintly, and if we do have just a small sense of how much we need to change - we should do what the shepherds did. Make haste to Bethlehem, the many Bethlehems that are the many places where the birth of Christ is being celebrated today, and see this thing which has taken place.

Years ago I remember a colleague of mine sending Christmas cards and in each one he wrote: 'I wish you a terrifying Christmas.' This isn't quite my message, but if we are to hear the song of the angels and receive the help of the gospel, maybe we should be a bit more concerned about how much we get things wrong and of how much we need the birth of Christ. So let this be my greeting: do not be afraid. Trust in God and trust in his Christ.

You can listen to the service [here](#)

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