

the birth of Jesus was announced to shepherds, but they were surely the last people you would have expected to hear about it. Their work forced them to live away from their communities and so they were always last to hear the news. But more than that, shepherds were smelly and ritually unclean because of their work. Yet God gave them the front seats in the Christmas story!

If we had been given the responsibility of compiling an appropriate guest list to welcome the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, I would guess that shepherds might not have made an appearance.

We might have thought about the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. If Jesus was their Messiah, surely it would be crucial for them to be there. We might have even considered the faithful worshippers who had been praying for this moment for years. But the idea of including some smelly shepherds probably wouldn't have occurred to us.

But it did occur to God. During Jesus' ministry, he consistently reached out to people who lived on the margins of society. The tax collectors, prostitutes, people suffering from leprosy, children – they were all welcome, because the kingdom that Jesus came to bring was open to everyone.

Tragically, every society pushes some people to the margins. In our own day it is often determined by ethnicity, colour, age, wealth or physical fitness. But as we follow Jesus, we need to keep a special eye on those who might get overlooked – because God will never overlook them, and he calls on us to embrace them with his love.

QUESTION

Who are the equivalents of the shepherds in our own society?

PRAYER

Thank you Lord that your love reaches out to all. Help me to pass on your love to those who are overlooked by society.
Amen

Photograph - Bethlehem nativity

