

Peace and goodness,

Trevor

Do you know of Jim Wallis? He's best known as the founder and former editor of Sojourners magazine and the Sojourners community in Washington, D.C.

Once, I heard him speak at an inner-city minister's conference in Chicago.

He told a story I'll never forget.

"I was speaking in a small town," he said, "And the pastor of the church at which I was speaking invited me to her house for supper with her family.

After supper, they had a surprise for me.

'Our four-year-old, Billy has memorized a part of the Christmas story' the pastor proudly proclaimed. 'He's going to recite it for you!'

(If you have a four-year-old, you know where this story is going).

Everyone at the table turned to Billy.

Billy took a deep breath and began to recite Luke 2:14.

(You know that verse, don't you? In the King James Version it reads
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.)

‘Glory to God in the highest,’ he said.

Then he was quiet.

‘Come on, Billy, you can do it!’ cheered his family.

He began again.

‘Glory to God in the highest,’ he said again.

Then he was quiet again.

‘Come on Billy, you can do it!’ said his family, a little quieter with slightly worried looks.

Suddenly, a light came on in Billy’s eyes.

His family breathed a sigh of relief.

Billy took a deep breath and with all of his might proclaimed, ‘Glory to God in the highest, AND I’LL HUFF AND I’LL PUFF AND I’LL BLOW YOUR HOUSE DOWN!’

And Jim Wallis said, ‘Here is what I learned from Billy. When we tell the Christmas story, we have to make sure we don’t forget the most important parts.’

In a humble way, I hope to shine a light on some of the smallest and most forgotten people in the story.

The shepherds.

So please hear a word from the Lord from Luke chapter 2 from the CBV, the Charlie Brown Version, of the New Testament.

“Sure, Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about,” said Linus. “Lights, please.”

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, 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, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

When he is finished with that last line, Linus turns to the audience: “That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.”

This is a word from God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

The Rev. Dr. Boyung Lee, a theologian pastor Jennifer and I have been reading to help us exegete the scriptures during Advent, writes -

**A messenger appears not to the powerful
but to shepherds—
people overlooked, underpaid, often mistrusted.**

**The text tells us they were terrified (phobeō).
And rightly so.**

**The Greek word for “host” (stratia) used to
describe the angelic multitude is military language.**

**To an occupied people,
an army doesn’t usually mean peace.**

**So when the angel says,
“Do not be afraid,” and then declares
“good news of great joy for all people” (Luke 2:10),**

**it is not a sentimental moment—
it is a revolutionary one.**

**This “good news” (euangelion) echoes Roman
proclamations of conquest and dominion.**

But Luke reclaims the word:

**Here, good news is not Caesar’s victory,
but God's vulnerability—**

**made flesh in a newborn wrapped in bands of
cloth and laid in a feeding trough.**

**Good news is not always louder than fear.
But it is stronger.**

That's the tension we live in.

**Like the shepherds—shaken awake in the night
by glory and confusion.**

The fear was real.

The risk was real.

**The circumstances of Jesus' birth—poverty,
displacement, estrangement—
are not erased by the angel's song.**

**And yet,
the good news comes anyway.**

Christmas Card from a Shepherd

Dear N'na and N'baba,

You wouldn't believe what happened to me tonight if you didn't love me, but you do love me so I know you'll believe me, and I know your mouth and your eyes and your ears and your heart will be as wide open as mine when I tell you.

The evening was like any other evening for a poor, lonely, shepherd like me. Momadu, the shepherd on the hill next to mine, brought his sheep by me on the way back from the stream below us. His first sheep had a sticker on its bump that said, "Sheep Happens," and when Momadu passed by he threw up his hands and smiled and said, "We're in deep sheep," so that made me laugh. There's nothing like good sheep humor to lighten a shepherd's heart.

I led my own flock down to the water. Small clouds of dust rose from the dry, hard, ground as we made our way down the hill. My bare feet stepped over the stony field, calloused from a young life of playing, working and living without shoes.

My sheep seemed to be growing out of the ground, their feet deeply rooted in the dirt.

"The Lord God formed life from the dust of the ground," teaches Holy writ.

I understand.

When we returned to the top of our hill, and I laid the sheep down to sleep in the green pastures for the night, the thing that has changed my life, the thing that will change your life, the thing that will change life itself, happened.

An angel of the Lord stood before me, me a lowly shepherd, and the glory of the Lord shone around me, and I was terrified. But the angel said to me, "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 Savior, 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 favors!”

When the angels left me, I ran to Momadu and shouted, “Did you see what I saw? Did you hear what I heard?” He did. “Let’s go now to Bethlehem,” I continued, “And see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”

We went quickly and found Mary and Joseph.

The child was lying in a manger.

Mary and Joseph looked at us. We were standing outside of the stable. Our clothes were tattered and torn, our feet were bare and dirty, and we smelled like sheep. I expected them to ask us to leave. But they surprised us. “Come here,” they whispered. They put their arms around our shoulders. “Welcome,” they whispered.

Mary picked up the baby and put him in my arms. “This is Jesus,” she said.

He looked up at me. His brown eyes were the same color as my eyes, his brown skin was the same color as my skin, his tattered clothes were as holey as my clothes. I sleep on the hay, too.

I held him close and felt his little heartbeat on my chest. I kissed his forehead with a gentle kiss. He smiled at me, and my life was changed forever.

“Thank you,” I said to Mary and Joseph.

“You’re welcome,” they said. They kissed Momadu and I on our foreheads with gentle kisses and sent us on our way.

We told everybody about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what we told them!

But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. We returned, glorifying and praising God for all we had heard and seen, as it had been told us.

Now I'm telling it to you!

N'na and N'baba, I think I know what God is telling us. We're the smallest and most forgotten people in the world, and God, in this little baby, has remembered us! God is with us. The world sees us as chancers and scroungers, layabouts and loungers. Us...the unseen ones. Us...the unloved ones. Us...the lonely ones. But God...God sees us. God...God loves us. God...God is with us!

As you lay your heads down on your mats tonight, and sleep comes softly over you like a wool blanket, please know that I am

Your Bala

God's shepherd

As we go out into this Christmas Eve,

hate will be loud, but in a small forgotten place will be a whisper of love;

injury will be loud, but in a small, forgotten place will be a whisper of pardon;

fear will be loud, but in a small, forgotten place will be a whisper of faith;

despair will be loud, but in a small, forgotten place will be a whisper of hope;

darkness will be loud, but in a small, forgotten place will be a whisper of light;
sadness will be loud, but in a small, forgotten place will be a whisper of joy.

Be the whisper.

Along with the shepherds, be the whisper.

Along with Mary and Joseph, be the whisper.

Along with Jesus, be the whisper.

And as we are the whispers, together, we will become a sound like the angelic multitude,

Glory to God in the highest, peace, good will to everyone.

Everyone.

And the good news will come.

Anyway.

Amen.