

OUTDOOR CAROL SERVICE (Market Hill): 17.12.25

I don't know if we have any midwives here tonight, but I want you to think about the birth of CHRIST, that it is about to happen – and not in Bethlehem – but here in Woodbridge!

The shepherds have heard the news first of all and they live and work out in the surrounding countryside – strange, unfamiliar places like Great Bealings, Culpho or Playford.

There are lots of big barns and houses tucked away there but our shepherds are curious. They want to go and see this 'thing that has happened' and hit the metropolis which is the beating heart of WOODBRIDGE: underneath these very steps of the Shire Hall in Market Hill! They know there are some good pubs; St Mary's House was the 'White Horse'. We know and love The Bull, The King's Head, but their preferred choice would probably have been 'The Angel' - for obvious reasons!

And yet, this wasn't their usual Friday night outing. They had come to witness something life-changing. They ran here in fact with their torches on, with real energy and enthusiasm. They were the very first to see with their own eyes, God come down to earth, God as the tiniest child born in a cattle shed, the coldest of mangers and temporary refugee's accommodation! But they were thrilled. They felt honoured. God chose to come down to ordinary, hard-working people, and in the big outdoors (as we are).

But you know, this tale has nothing to do with 'putting Christ back into Christmas'. He was there from the very beginning, weak, vulnerable – yes – but also adored.

He was cherished by those who had left their sheep behind to see the great, GOOD Shepherd. The Messiah had finally come and was here, at the heart of Market Hill, surrounded by Mary and Joseph & all the Angels and hosts of heaven.

I want you now to close your eyes and hear these beautiful words called a 'Northumbrian Nativity' which I am renaming -a 'Suffolk Nativity':

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O little child, root of Jesse,
promised one,
as we gather around the stable
as we go from Advent to Christmas
travel with us.

That's my prayer for everyone here tonight; that we enjoy the journey and most of all its ending which was a new beginning, God-with-us. And Bethlehem, that House of Bread, is our new home where we are forever fed, nurtured and loved - and where every race and nation is welcome to come, and kneel down, and worship. In the name....

Amen.