

# Holy Watchfulness and the Light That Comes

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The shepherds were watching.

Not doing anything particularly dramatic. Just the ordinary work of paying attention—keeping watch over their flocks by night. Hour after hour in the darkness, vigilant against whatever might threaten what they'd been entrusted with.

We know something about watching, don't we? We watch beside hospital beds. We watch bank accounts and checkbooks. We watch the news with a kind of anxious attention, wondering what tomorrow will bring. We watch our bodies change, our communities shift, our certainties become questions. Sometimes the watching feels endless—this vigil in the dark, wondering if the light will ever come.

And then it breaks through. To these shepherds, doing their ordinary work of watchfulness, the glory of the Lord shines around them. Angels proclaim good news of great joy. And here's what's remarkable: what they're sent to see isn't what anyone expected.

No armies. No chariots. No display of power that would make the watching unnecessary. Instead: a baby, wrapped in bands of cloth, lying in a manger. God with us—Emmanuel—not as the force that abolishes vulnerability, but as vulnerability itself. An unwed mother. Her betrothed. A feeding trough for a cradle. This is what the light looks like when it enters our darkness.

The mighty God comes as a baby who cannot speak, cannot walk, cannot survive without others. The Prince of Peace arrives in a world of

empire and occupation, choosing not dominance but dependence. The Wonderful Counselor is wrapped in swaddling clothes, silent.

If you weren't watching carefully—if you were looking for something flashy or powerful or conventionally impressive—you'd miss it entirely. But the shepherds were watching. And because they were watching from the margins themselves, because they knew what it meant to be vulnerable, they recognized what they saw.

Here's the beautiful thing: the shepherds didn't stop watching after that night. They returned to their fields. Back to the ordinary work of vigilance, back to their flocks, back to the night shift. But everything was different now. They went back glorifying and praising God, telling everyone what they had seen.

The watching didn't end when the light came. It transformed. They became witnesses. They became light-bearers themselves.

In a moment, we'll light candles. I'll light one flame, and then we'll share that light, one to another, until this whole room glows. It's a simple act, but it carries a profound truth: we cannot generate the light ourselves. We receive it. We're given what we cannot create. And then—and this is the heart of it—we share it.

The light doesn't come to those who are already bright and shining. It comes to those who are watching in the darkness. It comes as vulnerability, not despite it. It dignifies our watching, our waiting, our own experiences of fragility and limitation.

When you hold your candle tonight, you're joining that ancient line of watchers who have seen the light and become light-bearers. Your flame is small—just one among many. But in the darkness, even small flames

matter. Even vulnerable light changes things. One candle shared becomes two. Two become four. Four become many.

Jesus said he was the Light of the World. And then—remarkably—he turned to ordinary people like us and said, "Now you are the light of the world." Not because we're mighty, but because we've seen the Mighty God who chose to arrive as a baby in a manger. Not because we're powerful, but because we've encountered the Prince of Peace in swaddling clothes.

The watching continues. But now we watch as those who have seen the light. Now we watch as those called to share it. Let your light shine.

Amen.