

It is a time of uncertainty for us at St. Andrew. As of now, we are looking for a new pastor to lead us in God's work. Many of us are probably grieving at the loss of our pastor of seventeen years, some of us may be feeling anxiety at what will happen and who the synod will send to us, and there may be some discomfort in the change that is happening in our congregation. That is all right. It is all normal. Change is hard.

In today's gospel, we are also talking about a change. We have gotten so used to these stories we have forgotten what it means for it to be new. Yet around 2000 years ago this was brand new. A baby born and lying in a manger who was about to change the world. So let's try something. We are going to do a guided meditation.

Close your eyes if you feel comfortable with that or just relax and focus on your breath. Now picture yourself in a field at night. The sky is dark except for the stars that are twinkling bright. The sheep are leisurely eating the grass or kneeling on the ground resting and you can see a few small trees and bushes. The air is cool and there is a slight wind blowing through the leaves of the plants. You are somewhat sleepy and are sitting on the grass with your back against a small tree. You and the other shepherds are dozing in and out of sleep. All of the sudden there is a bright, blinding, light. You jolt awake sitting straight up. What is that? What is going on? Fear courses through you and the sheep are making a lot of agitated noises. In the light you can see a human looking creature. It is not clear if the being is a man or a woman but it stands before you in a long white robe and a calm look on its face. The being says in an authoritative, yet gentle voice: "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: **11** to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. **12** This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." Then other heavenly beings appear saying "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on

earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” Then as fast as they came, the messengers from God disappear. You and the other shepherds look at each other in amazement and shock. What just happened?

What comes up for you after the messengers disappear or when the first messenger appears?

What feelings are you feeling and what thoughts go through your mind? Sit with all that comes up for you for a few more minutes and open your eyes when you are ready. I will ring the chime to bring us back to the room. (Pause)

So here we are back in 2023. From the story, we know what the shepherds did. They ran to Bethlehem to see this new born baby. The Savior, the Messiah, the Lord. They ran toward God’s change in the world.

We are like those shepherds right now at St. Andrew’s. We have an opportunity to run toward the change that God is making in our church right now. It can be scary, sad, and anxiety provoking. I am sure the Shepherds were feeling mixed emotions with the experience they had seeing angels and the presence of God with them and then to find out about this huge change that God is bringing into the world. Yet rather than run from or ignore the challenge, they ran towards it. They ran toward the manger, toward God’s gift to us - God’s grace and salvation.

God gives us the strength to do that as well. While there is change, there is also opportunity. We can run from the change or we can run to it and see what God does.

Our reading today says the Shepherds went with haste “and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger.” We know they were deeply affected by the meeting of the Christ child because they went out and told everyone about their experience and glorified and praised God because of what they had seen. God’s work in the world is amazing. And Her work at St. Andrew can be amazing too. We just need to be patient and listen to Her in this time. She will show us where we need to be and take us where we need to go. She will bring the people we need into our lives.

Therefore at this time, it is important to stay focused on God. We can do that through prayer or time with God through meditation, exercise, walking through nature or however you speak with God. Listen to Her and listen to each other. Pastor Mark said at our most recent staff meeting to remember that it is ok to disagree but stay connected and continue to listen to each other through the disagreements. We can do this because God is working with us and through us to do something new. And knowing our God it will be amazing. Therefore, remember to listen to God as she leads us to the new and helps us grieve the old. In Jesus name, Amen