

What's the real story?

This short sketch could be used during the Christmas season or perhaps even on a Sunday afterwards. It is offered as a way of introducing our NWBA theme for 2017, but is by no means constrained by that. It seeks to convey the simple message that God can speak in the most difficult and unexpected of circumstances, perhaps even in situations that our first instinct would be to try and "fix". It is intended as an introduction to a sermon or reflection that would contradict the final line, People might be invited to focus on some of the events happening in our world, particularly those that they might not welcome, and explore whether God might be seeking to say something within them. This might also lead a congregation to reflect on how they understand prayer – it can often be presented as simply the vehicle through which we invite God to intervene to re-configure the world to our expectations. To be prayerful is to give key priority to listening; seeking God's message and intent through circumstances as we encounter them.

The scene is three journalists sitting at adjacent desks or seats, or perhaps around a common "news table". One is on the phone while the other two are typing into laptops or similar. (The Script could be adjusted for 2 or 4 speakers as required)

JOURNALIST 1: *(ANSWERING AND SPEAKING ON A PHONE)* Bethlehem Gazette good morning
(pause as though listening to the person on the other end) yes you can cancel if you want to -
but there will be an admin charge . . . *(pause)*. . . no that's right not as much as leaving the advert in,
but of course we can't guarantee page space in future editions once you release it*(pause)*
. . well you might be full now, but you can't be sure who might take your number for later use
. . . .*(pause)* yes if you cancel before lunch it can be withdrawn from today's edition
very well, please let us know when you want it to re-appear. Goodbye.

JOURNALIST 2: Another Inn Keeper?

JOURNALIST 1: That's the third today – they're all so full they don't need to advertise

JOURNALIST 2: Accounts won't be pleased

JOURNALIST 3: They'll be even less pleased if we don't come up with a front page story. You can't just run a paper on classifieds.

JOURNALIST 2: That's true; trouble is for all the crowds that are here, they're all too busy with the census to do anything newsworthy.

JOURNALIST 1: Bed shortage in the hospitality sector?

JOURNALIST 2: It's hardly front page!

JOURNALIST 3: Community outrage at further Roman taxation?

JOURNALIST 2: We've done that one to death...*(moment's silence while all three pause to think)* Did either of you get anywhere with that dispute over shepherds' access to the grazing fields.

JOURNALIST 1: I tried to follow it up a couple of days ago, but couldn't get much sense out of any of them.

JOURNALIST 3: Yeah, I was following a lead on that one, but he seemed to lose the plot completely, started ranting on about seeing a sky full of angels on the night shift.

JOURNALIST 1: I heard something about that, apparently there's a group of them who reckon they had an angelic visit – do you think the story's got legs?

JOURNALIST 2: Bunch of drunken shepherds claim to have seen a ghost – we'd be a laughing stock if we ran that as a serious story.

JOURNALIST 3: Well there was some talk about them crashing in on some young couple just after the wife had given birth.

JOURNALIST 1: Drunken Shepherds break into house of new-born! – that could work

JOURNALIST 2: Why on earth would they do that? It's over the top even for shepherds.

JOURNALIST 3: Well here's the thing – the couple weren't in a house. Apparently - the baby was born in the open air.

JOURNALIST 1: We could maybe run the accommodation story on the back of that one – B&B shortage forces birthing mother outdoors

JOURNALIST 3: Or maybe use that to have a dig at the Romans – "Tax crazy emperor risks life of new-born"

JOURNALIST 2: Let's keep off the anti-Roman stories for a while shall we, you know what happened we ran that piece about rowdy foot-soldiers

JOURNALIST 3: Yeah that's true. How about we take the irresponsible parent angle – I heard they were from up north. Something like "negligent father leaves family on the streets".

JOURNALIST 1: (proudly) how about "Surprise roadside delivery shocks parents"?

JOURNALIST 3: That's clever

JOURNALIST 2: Hmm - it could work, but I'm not sure how the hallucinating shepherds fit in.

JOURNALIST 3: Well the way I heard it was that the shepherds claimed that the angels sent them into town specifically to find the couple with the baby.

JOURNALIST 1: And why exactly would a legion of angels send a bunch of half-baked shepherds to visit some rough sleepers who can't look after their kids properly?

JOURNALIST 3: Well – according to my source, the angels told the shepherds that the child has been sent by God to be the world's Saviour – Christ the Lord and Prince of peace.

JOURNALIST 2: And you seriously want us to run that as a story?

JOURNALIST 1: (*lifting hand and pointing words as if setting a headline*) Bethlehem celebrates its two-day old saviour! That's one crazy headline!

JOURNALIST 3: I'm just telling you what I heard – don't shoot the messenger!

JOURNALIST 2: Well however we run this story – let's keep God out of it shall we.

JOURNALIST 1: Well we could ask some God questions around it

JOURNALIST 2: Like what exactly?

JOURNALIST 1: I don't know, maybe something like – “have we given up on God as Saviour is left to be born in the street?”

JOURNALIST 3: Bit deep don't you think?

JOURNALIST 1: “Are we the only ones who will listen?” ask Shepherds in the wake of angelic visit. . . We could maybe follow it up with an opinions piece – what is God saying to his struggling nation?

JOURNALIST 3: Well I guess it *could* work, maybe run a couple of editorials around historic Messianic promises and stuff.

JOURNALIST 1: (*Imagining other headlines*) If this child is not our Messiah, then who is? . . .

JOURNALIST 3: (*as if imagining a different headline*) Is this the dawn of Salvation? ask confused migrant workers . . .

JOURNALIST 2: Have you two gone completely mad! We're running a story about a couple of homeless northerners having a baby on the streets; a bunch of mad shepherds claiming to have seen angels in the middle of the night. The town is in total chaos with all the visitors for the poll tax registration; we can't even celebrate a festival without the Roman's permission and you seriously want us to run a story asking whether God's at work in all of this!

JOURNALIST 1: Well it's certainly a different take

JOURNALIST 3: And we're only reporting what some people are asking.

JOURNALIST 2: Look – I like the story. Why don't you two get out there and see if you can find this couple before someone from the Chronicle gets hold of them. Let's get a bit of background on them and see where that leads us. But let's be absolutely clear, whatever is going on has got nothing to do with God! Let's not waste our time going down that blind alley.

JOURNALIST 3: Maybe just a paragraph in the editorial?

JOURNALIST 2: Let's just run the story and keep God well and truly out of it.

ENDS

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