

**December 31, 2023 Christmas 2023**

**The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God**

**May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son  
and of the Holy Ghost.**

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God. The magi leave by another road. We've got New Year's to look forward to but Christmas Day and our Christmas celebrations are already behind us and our return to work, or to school, or to a more normal pattern in January is already fast approaching.

The shepherds return to their fields have encountered the Christ-child, God born as one of us. The magi return via another route, transformed by meeting the one who is God's Word made flesh for the transformation of all us.

How are we called upon to return to the long dry days of January this Christmas? Where were our transformational encounters? We might have been lucky to have had a particular encounter with God in worship this Christmas, or in the face of someone we love, or in the kindness or friendship of strangers. Or our encounters may have been more mundane. The stress of Christmas Day, the pressures of family, the slight disappointment that Christmas was not as we longed for or expected, not as we planned, or not as we needed.

How do we return to our every day like the shepherds?

What is transforming us to take another route like the magi?

This end of the calendar year is an invitation to encounter afresh the one who returned the shepherds to their every day, to meet again the one who sent the magi home by another route. We come together this morning to celebrate our eucharist to encounter God in Christ in the bread and wine of our eucharist, just as the shepherds and the magi encounter God in the birth of the Christ-child.

Whether our Christmases were sublime or suboptimal, we are always invited to this encounter afresh - not just Christmas Day, but everyday.

In each and every Eucharist, each and every Mass, we encounter Christ afresh. We are returned to our every day afresh. We are sent out and sent home, sometimes to find God and joy anew in our every day, sometimes to find God in new and untravelled routes. As we prepare to return to the normality of January, which of these is God calling us to this year? To find God anew in the familiar or to seek God anew in an as yet untravelled route?

Whatever we're called to this year, we know this:

that God will be ready to meet us again in this place in bread and wine, and to send us out again, renewed and transformed by our encounter with him, just as the shepherds and the magi were transformed by Christ, even as we are transformed by his presence with us in the bread of his body, and the wine of his blood, even as we are sent out from this place having fed on him, having celebrated his presence with us this day, and every day we encounter him afresh. Amen.