

Did you know that Christmas Eve celebrates the biggest interruption in human history? It's true. At the moment that Christ entered the world, the same way that all of us and our babies are born, God tapped humanity on the collective shoulder.

He said, "Pardon me." And eternity interrupted time, divinity interrupted humanity, and heaven interrupted the earth in the form of a baby. Christianity—and our hope—was born in one big heavenly interruption.

Just ask the Bethlehem shepherds. We know so little about those men—and possibly women. We don't know their names. We have no idea about their ages. How many were on duty that night? We just don't know. But this much we can safely assume: They were not waiting for any excitement. They were watching sheep—and sheep are NOT exciting. Even the Bible says it in an unexcited way: "That night, some shepherds were in the fields nearby watching their sheep." Yawn. We count sheep to go to sleep!

Besides, this was the night shift. Might as well watch paint dry. Shepherds watching sheep sleep? Wow. Saying that sentence is more exciting than doing that job. Their greatest challenge was probably trying to stay awake! These people expected no excitement.

Actually, they didn't want any excitement. Any excitement was bad excitement—wolves, mountain lions, poachers. To be honest, shepherds like the predictable. They love the calm. Their singular aim was to go back to their tent and tell their wives, "Nothing happened last night."

Just because they wanted a calm night, though, didn't mean they would get it. Just like us. Just because we want a calm life, there's no guarantee that we'll have one. Doesn't it seem that the minute we sink down in the easy chair of life it feels like a remote control gets pushed and the channel gets changed:

Things like: The financial aid office says "no."

The boss hands you a pink slip.

The test grade says "F."

The bank says "Overdrawn."

The car says "I need new tires."

The auto mechanic says something like, "You need new brakes or tires", or the dreaded "totaled."

The bills say "past due."

The doctor says "I have some bad news."

Our typical initial response is the same one the shepherds had. Fear. The angel of the Lord stood before them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them, and they became very frightened—shaking in their sandals—terrified.

I think I can safely say that change almost always brings fear before it brings faith. Don't we always assume the worst before we look for the best? When our lives are interrupted with something we've never seen, rather than praise God, we panic! We interpret the presence of a problem as the absence of God and want to run.

Good thing the shepherds didn't do that. Good thing they lingered. Otherwise they might have missed the second verse. Remember this part: "Today your Savior is born in the town of David. He is Christ, the Lord."

I hope you'll do what the shepherds did—follow the instructions and then linger at the manger. The writings in this book try to help us to do just that.

Many of us have heard the Christmas story for quite a few years now. Probably a whole lot has changed since the first time you heard it. Maybe a whole lot has changed since you heard it just last year.

But even though things change, the biggest thing has stayed the same. The biggest news is still the best news. Christ entered our world. And as a result we can enter his.

I'm here to tell you tonight that this whole Christianity thing is not complicated stuff. It's a love story—pure and simple. We don't need the pomp of religion. No confusing fog of theology. It's just this: God loved us so much he came to us in Jesus. God was willing to take off the heavenly robes of glory and enter our world as one of us—just to prove how much he loves us. On this night the doors to the throne room of heaven were opened and God came to us—so that we can come to him.

Has it been awhile since you've come to him? Has it been awhile since you lingered at the manger? If your prayers seem a little stale, it probably has. If your faith seems to be a little shaky, maybe your vision of him has blurred. If you can't find power to face your problems, maybe it's time to go again to the manger and face him.

One warning though. Your life may be interrupted—just like the shepherds. When you do see him, catch a glimpse of his majesty, you can become addicted to it. One glimpse of the King and you will probably be consumed by a desire to see more of him. Pew-warming might not be an option anymore. Religion by rote might not be enough. Once you see his face, you will want to see it again and again.

So ... Come to the manger and linger. Linger long enough to hear the best news in the world, "I am with you always." Because of tonight, that's the truth.