

Two thousand and fifteen years ago, or thereabouts, during the day before **THE** night, the people of Bethlehem went about their work and their lives, doing things the way they'd always done them, working, shopping, visiting and worshipping. The big difference was the snap census ordered by the Roman emperor, which brought people from far-away places into Bethlehem, for whom Bethlehem was their *home-town*, to register with the census bureau, and whilst there, they took time to visit members of their extended family and long-lost friends whom they had not met in many years, bringing greetings, updating family news, exchanging memories and swapping gifts.

It was not, "O little town of Bethlehem, how **still** we see Thee lie", it was more like "O busy town of Bethlehem, how nice to see you resting after a busy day".

As the residents of Bethlehem were resting, **God was at work.**

A handful of helpful older women would have been busy attending to a young mother who had travelled from Nazareth with her husband, giving birth to her first child, a son. Did they know this infant was a very special package from Heaven, the Promised Messiah? Not likely, but God was at work!

God was at work during the darkest hours of the night, when a small band of shepherds minding their sheep on a hillside nearby, were startled awake when they saw heaven open, the presence of God fill the sky, and a choir of thousands of angels singing to the glory of God, when one of them steps out to tell them of the good news of the Messiah's birth.

God was at work that night in the life of a community of astrologers who needed assurance that their long journey to visit "The King of the Jews", whose sign they saw in the star-studded sky, was their worshipful duty!

God was at work, and has never stopped working! God is at work in our world. He has stirred your hearts and minds, to step out on a dark and cold night and worship Him here, tonight. We don't know how, and we don't need to know why, but God is at work in the lives of people in Cumbria amidst the flooding, God is at work in families going through the agony of the death of a loved one, or domestic violence; God is at work all over the world, among people displaced by economic, social and political turmoil; God is standing by to work His loving purpose in the lives of those who plot and plan evil, but its their choice not to heed Him and ignore His presence.

We live in a world of choices: we choose to embrace the science fiction of *Star Wars as if it were real*; we choose to welcome every new James Bond film *as if it had historical value*; we choose to accept the film "The Danish Girl" *as if it was normal* for all humans to **choose** their gender, to be male or female, whichever makes them feel most comfortable.

We live in a world in which we love Maggie Smith, her inimitable, acerbic quips and punchy one-liners, but her performance in the "The Lady in the Van" *with its brilliant insights into loneliness and age*<sup>1</sup>, does not stir our social conscience into action. We just love to admire her acting, and choose to ignore the message of the film!

On a dark night two thousand and fifteen years ago, God was at work coming to us as His Son, changing the lives of a young bewildered, confused, but obedient couple; , God was at work changing the lives of a band of obedient shepherds, and God was at work changing the lives of a community of obedient astrologers, changing each of them to believe in, and trust the Truth.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Guardian in The Guardian, Thursday 12 November 2015

God is at work in you tonight. Will you allow His Holy Spirit to change your life and give you the opportunity and boldness to trust Him, and to share His Good News with others?

**AMEN**