

If I could choose anyone to be in the story tonight, I would be a shepherd.

When my children were little, whenever we watched a kid's movie, we always tried to figure out which character we were. In Finding Nemo, I was Dori because I have no sense of direction but I speak whale (meaning I have secret hidden talents that seem superfluous but come in handy in the strangest situations). In assigning parts, we were either like one of the characters or we longed to have the experience of one of the characters.

Tonight, in the story we just heard, I would choose to be one of the shepherds. I can imagine having an amazing God experience, not really understanding its implications but feeling compelled to tell everyone what just happened. In fact, now that I think about it, I am kinda like a shepherd in real life. I like experiences I do not really understand but that I recognize come

from God, and I like to tell everyone I know about those experiences so we can wonder together.

Tonight we all have the opportunity to enter into the story. Through choosing who we are in the story, because of who we are or where we are in our lives, we can enter in. That is the point, really, to enter in, to let the story be part of who we are, to let ourselves be part of the story. It is about engagement and relationship. God has been wooing us all along, whether it was through the ten commandments, through exile and restoration, through the establishment of the nation of Israel, through captivity, through prophecy. It always has been and always will be about being in relationship with God, being one with the Divine.

Let's face it: God became One with humanity through the Incarnation. This was the ultimate bid for connection. How, then, do we

continually look for opportunities to enter into our oneness with God?

One of the ways is through the very story of this incarnational mystery. We have heard it a million times. We know it in the marrow of our bones. It is so familiar to us.

Who are we in the story. I told you all who I am, but who are you? One of the ways to accept this invitation to be one with God is to see who we are in the story.

Are you the prophet? Are you Intent on looking for the long game? Do you enter deeply into the struggle of light against darkness, work for oppression to end, for burdens to be lifted? Do you know intimately the names of God and burn with the desire for others to see God's plans or purposes? You might be Isaiah tonight.

Are you not afraid to linger in the presence of creativity, chaos, and wonder? Do you sometimes find yourself saying things that challenge a person to stretch in a new way because that stretching benefits the purposes of love? You might be a messenger of God, the angel Gabriel.

Have you been going along in your life, minding your own business, doing exactly what is expected of you and making the normal plans, when something surprising seems to be breaking through? Do you find yourself yearning to be placed in a situation of saying yes to a seemingly outlandish invitation for your life to open up? Do you want to say YES, Yes even though you might be scared? Then tonight you are Mary or you are Joseph.

When we hear a sacred story like we do tonight and we ponder to ourselves, who am I in this

story? it is a way to hear the invitation to relationship with ourselves and with God. Truly the biggest invitation of all was the incarnation, God taking on human flesh, human form. No longer separate from our fleshly reality, the Divine incarnate offers the fullest invitation: I am one with flesh, you come be one with me, with the Divine.

Happy Christmas. Yes. Happy Christmas. We will go from this place and, sometime, in the next twenty-four hours, open a present. Before that happens, right now, let's receive the first gift of this Christmas for us: our belonging in the overarching story of God.