

I've always loved O Holy Night. Especially when it's so beautifully done.

I love the words too, but this year a particular line grabbed me. Then he appeared and the soul felt its worth. Let's first make sure we're clear on the word soul. The soul is not something that separates from our bodies. The soul is that which makes you, you. It's the very essence of our being...who we are at our core.

Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth...how many of our souls feel their worth? Do you, at your very core, at the essence of who you are, know your worth?

The shepherds probably really didn't. We've romanticized the shepherds a bit but there was nothing romantic about being a shepherd in the Judean desert. Grass was scarce so their life was nomadic. Water was also scarce – not near enough was left after both sheep and shepherds drank to bathe. Shepherds weren't clean.

Shepherds were hired hands. Men wealthy enough to own that many sheep wouldn't have been the ones doing the dirty work. Shepherds were at the bottom rung of the economic ladder. And if something happened to one of the sheep, their pay would be docked even further.

They were definitely not the ones who first heard an announcement this big. Usually, when a royal son was born, the birth of that son...that heir to the throne... was announced by palace officials to the reigning king's powerful supporters...or his rivals.

It would have been a momentous occasion with lots of pomp and posturing. Shepherds were definitely not a part of the crowd invited to a palace to hear the usual good news of great joy that a son had been born to the ruling king.

But here it is...the lowest of the lowly...they were the first to hear the good news...the first to witness to this newborn Messiah....this newborn king.

For maybe the first time ever, that night the souls of the shepherds finally knew their worth...not to the rest of the world maybe, but to God. Because God chose them to hear the news first.

So much of the rest of Jesus' story is about Jesus appearing to those who had been told by the world their souls...their lives...weren't worth much. Tax collectors, women, working class fishermen, lepers, the sick and lame, sinners...the misfits and the outcasts.

But Jesus...the eternal word made flesh...appeared, really as one of them. He was born to a peasant couple, like one of them. He went to their homes. He ate with them. And their souls finally knew their worth to God.

How many of you feel your worth to God? The world still tries to tell some of us that our lives aren't worth much.

And how many who are wealthy or powerful know their worth at their very core – without having to prove anything? Jesus was born to a peasant couple...his birth was announced first to shepherds...and they were the first to announce it to a world that looked down on them. That means that what God values is the very essence of who we are, not what the world tells us about who we are.

Whoever you are, whatever you've been told about your worth, whatever doubts you may have about your worth, Jesus was born for you. On this holy night, may all our souls know their worth.