When I first was looking at the Lectionary Scripture for today
I had thought of using the reading from Matthew
that follows the arrival of the Wisemen

The sad and disturbing telling of the killing of the innocents....

Herod's paranoia at the thought

of a King being born to take over his throne,

But it didn't seem like a good way to start the year.

However, I chose not to change the sermon title because I think that it is important to not gloss over this part of the Christmas Story or any part of the Bible that we find not as pleasing as others.

We would like to imagine that every story is only full of good...
but as we continue to see even in the past year –
such events still permeate our story.

Many waited for 2016 to end –finding it a difficult year...
the economical, political and world picture
seeming quite bleak...
but I fear that 2017 is looking to be a very unsettling year....

Gail read for us today about the shepherds and the naming/circumcision of Jesus... yesterday she texted that she was glad

it wasn't anything difficult...

I had thought at that moment about the naming of Jesus and how Matthew has a good telling of Jesus' lineage... complete with obscure names and difficult pronunciations – but unfortunately there wasn't enough time to make another change to the Order of Service ©

So what does our Scripture share with us

as we begin this new year?

What hope does it bring? What message is there for us?

I bring your attention to four points of the Scripture, that hopefully sets us in good stead to step further into the new year.

First we start in the manger scene –
the shepherds have come to visit
after hearing the message from the angels.
They find Mary and Joseph there

and they share with them all that the angels had said.

They leave glorifying God

and sharing the Good News with those they meet.

Our first lesson -

That the good news is meant to be responded to and it is meant to be shared.

Have we who have hurried to sing the carols of Christmas this year departed glorifying God?

On Christmas Day, my 25 year old niece and I,

as the three of us walked through downtown Victoria, joyfully sang Christmas carols

To her the music ...the melody...

uplifts her and brings her joy.

To me it is the words and what they mean and represent.

But together we glorified God

Sometimes the hardest thing we do is to share our faith...

Especially when the news is old....

But may we be inspired once again...

by the enthusiasm of the shepherds

and step further into this new year – glorifying God and sharing the Good News Of Jesus.

As the shepherds shared about what the angel said...

Mary pondered these things in her heart

Our Second Lesson – We need to take time .

Time to be present.... To be in the moment

Who here is guilty of busy-ness?

Who here runs out of hours in the day?

Who here schedules time with themselves...with God?

I remember a lady once saying that her prayer list was so long

she needed to go to bed an hour earlier just to get through it.

It may seem odd for Mary to ponder things in her heart

as Shepherds are telling her what the angels had said...

but can you imagine how overwhelmed she must have been?

I think it is a beautiful image for her to step back

and take it all in....to be present in the moment.

So much we miss in the hurry and the busy...

May we find moments like Mary did... to ponder

As we step further into the new year

may we be present in our own lives

The third Lesson is about: Practicing our faith

In the midst of everything Mary and joseph

took the time to follow God's law - to circumcise Jesus

To fulfill the law of the Torah

We too need to practice our faith... Through coming to church... even on days with guest Ministers,

By reading the Bible, attending Bible study,

through prayer and contemplation.

Relationships require effort... both earthly and heavenly.

While on the island we stopped in Nanaimo

to visit a school friend I had not seen in 25 years.

It was lovely to see her and catch up...

but it was not the same as visiting a friend

I see more frequently ...who sees me in good and in bad...

Like becoming a professional hockey player,

or a NASA astronaut Our relationship with God needs practice and dedication to get stronger...

May you practice your faith through

studying his word and eating at his table....

For his blood was shed for you... his body broken for you.

The fourth lesson... a foundation for the other three Intimacy with God

On this 8th day Jesus is given his earthly name, of flesh and blood...told to Mary before his birth

While in Victoria we visited my brother.

Garry asked him.... Whether he had a nick name.

AS Garry discovered that we all seem to...

Murray quickly said no – I don't remember ...and then said – Fiona's was 'chief'.

but I don't know why dad called her that.

Garry quickly replied – Didn't you live with her??

My brother smiled

and suddenly remembered why I was named chief.

Many people have nick names -

terms of endearment we give to each other....

Jesus wasn't a nick name, but by us being allowed to use it – it shows how God has restored his people.

You see before then the people of Israel

did not speak God's name.

It was 'I am who I am"

or YHWH incomplete without vowels.

It was believed that if people couldn't pronounce it

they wouldn't take it in vain.

But that 8th day God stepped even closer to his people...

In his son Jesus Christ

Formality was lessened

A child of heaven and earth Bridged the gap.

On this the first day of the new year...

And Tomorrow ...and the day after...

May you find yourselves embraced by God

swaddled in his love...

May you as you step further into this new year

Glorify God

Share the Good News

Ponder what God is doing

Practice your faith

And live in the intimacy of the relationship you have with God, the Father,

Through Jesus the son

With the power of the holy spirit

Amen.

feel, experience, ponder, glorify, share,