

The (good)will of the people

And the angel said unto them: "Do not be afraid! I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the city of David a Saviour has been born to you: he is the Messiah, the Lord."

And a shepherd said unto the angel: "Hold it right there, chum".

And the angel did hold it, right there.

And the shepherd said "In the current political climate you can't seriously expect that any proposal will cause great joy for all the people?"

And the angel said, "Well..."

And the shepherd did continue, as his question had in fact been rhetorical. "We've been debating the options and even among this small and barely representative cross-section of the Jewish agricultural working class there is a wide and apparently unbridgeable range of opinions as to the way forward to a solution in the search for an acceptable Messiah."

And the angel said, "Go on".

And the shepherd did point out his three colleagues.

"Jacob here is a Zealot, all for us going it alone. Tell the Romans exactly where to put their Empire. The Samaritans and the Greeks, they can go home too."

"Joanna", on the other hand, she's a Rome-ainer. She thinks there are several things that the Romans have, in fact, done for us."

"Jeremiah, he's a social activist. No surrendering unto Caesar. He proposes an end to Augustus-erity and the scandal of babies having to sleep in feeding troughs wrapped in second-hand clothing."

"Me, I think we need to remember who it was that sorted out Egypt and the Philistines. Moses and King David, that's my kind of good shepherd. God on our side—and a proper price for a sacrificial lamb."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, arguing among themselves about the merits of Purgatory as a time-limited backstop for salvation.

And the angel said again, loudly: "Today in the city of David is born for you a Saviour: he is the Messiah, the Lord!"

And the shepherd said: "You're surely not going to say 'He's the only possible Messiah!?' To please all of this lot you'd need to be a peaceful revolutionary agitator who sets families against one another, believes we're the chosen people but treats Romans and Samaritans equally, pays taxes but won't accept the judgments of the courts, stands up for adulterers, pimps, scroungers and lepers, resists all political compromise and relentlessly attacks those in power for greed, pride and self-seeking hypocrisy. Anyone who did all that would be crucified."

And the angel said unto them: "You will find the baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger."