

**The Shepherds' Landscape – a reflection for Angelos, arts event for the Feast of Epiphany to savour the Realms of Glory angels exhibition and celebrate the contribution of Rebecca Slingsby to the life of Dorchester Abbey.**

Reading

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

Reflection

In reflecting on the landscape of the shepherds we will consider biblical, pastoral life and the work of Rebecca Slingsby.

The shepherds were living in the fields. This was their place of work. Familiar territory. Their landscape.

Rebecca said: <sup>1</sup>*"The way I make my art is to sit in the landscape, looking at my subject, trying to understand all that energy that's coming towards me."*

How did the shepherds do their work – the art of shepherding?

A tended fire - essential for safety from wolves, a source of light and heat. See sparks from a smoldering branch stirred by the shepherd boy's staff. Plenty of time to learn, by watching carefully, how fire behaves. Sparks. <sup>2</sup>*Scintilla: the glittering speck.*

They sleep with the sheep in a simple improvised sheepfold, a temporary affair, which can easily be moved to another location. A fence is built of tangled thorn bushes. Thorns.

It can be taken down easily when time to move on to another location.

*"I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be"* (Ezekiel 34:14.15)

A more secure fold may be built from stones, collected from the land around. Thorn bushes are put on the top of the wall. Stones. And Thorns.

There is a gate guarded by a watchman.

*"He that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the watchman openeth."* (John 10:1-3).

And into the shepherds' landscape - into the gate of the sheepfold - steps the announcing angel. Standing before them. Giving them the amazing news of the Messiah's birth.

And then a whole host of angels, too many to count. And the glory of the Lord shone around them.

Like Rebecca's<sup>3</sup> *"minute particles of pigment which individually are so minute you cannot see them but collectively they form this great array of colour"*.

And the shepherds are terrified. But they recognise what they must do.

They recognise His voice. The Angel is the Messenger from their Shepherd.

Like sheep, they are thoroughly familiar with their own shepherd's tone of voice. *"The sheep follow him, for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers"* (John 10:4,5).

They follow him. He leads them to Himself.

They must pass through the landscape to find the child.

The moon's light will help them now that they are away from the firelight.

Rebecca said of the moon: <sup>4</sup>*"Its secrets and the way it paints the space around itself have long inspired me and lit my inner vistas"*.

The energy coming towards the shepherds is from the Christ child.

Here, in the People's Chapel of Dorchester Abbey, He is placed in the landscape of his birth – a humble place, angels, his loving parents, visitors – all set against the backdrop of the future. Sun, moon, stars, the cross, and a human tragedy that brings hope.

Rebecca. We have been able to watch with you. You have explored and shared the message of light and energy. You have seen all of this, <sup>5</sup>*"with the eyes of our ancestors, and hopefully with the eyes of our descendants"*. Thank you.

Denise Line, Dorchester, Oxfordshire 2018

- 1 Rebecca Hind: video, Leaves from a Book of Hours. [youtube.com/watch?v=BcffzDkmWrQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcffzDkmWrQ)
- 2 [rebeccahind.com/scintilla](http://rebeccahind.com/scintilla)
- 3 see 1
- 4 moonscope 2007 Exhibition Booklet. Rebecca Hind
- 5 moonscope Exhibition Booklet. Professor B Catling, The Ruskin School of Drawing & Fine Art