

'He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty' words from our Gospel reading, **St Luke's Gospel, the first chapter, beginning to read at the 52nd verse. May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

It's hard to believe we're nearly at the end of Advent. This time next week, it will be Boxing Day and we'll be celebrating St Stephen's Day here with our Sunday Eucharist.

We'll hopefully have had a joyous celebration of our Lord's birth with as many family and friends as we feel is safe - though many of us may find ourselves feeling lonely either because we're isolating, or friends and family are isolating, or Christmas is a time of year in which we always find ourselves feeling lonely or overlooked.

In all our Christmas celebrations it's all too easy to overlook those who do not find Christmas easy - those who live on their own, those who have lost friends and loved ones this year, those who are going through a particularly difficult time.

Christmas can be a time when our own celebrations mean we overlook those for whom the joy of Christmas is slight.

Those the world overlooks are one of the themes which emerges from our readings this morning. The town in which God becomes one of us is a town which can be all too easily overlooked - O Little Town of Bethlehem - 'one of the little clans of Judah'.

In our second reading, we read about how God sanctifies us through the bruised and broken body of Jesus. That body whose birth we are preparing to celebrate, that body which the world rejects is the body by which God brings us to himself. The tortured body of a falsely convicted criminal is all too easily overlooked by the world around it - think of all those prisoners in gaols across the world even today who are the victims of show trials.

Our Gospel reading is also a story of the overlooked. Elizabeth, Mary, even John the Baptist. The two women are overlooked by virtue of being women - all too often overlooked and marginalised in society even today.

Elizabeth has been looked over as childless, Mary as a young woman and unwed expectant mother. Even John the Baptist's leap for joy reminds us just how often children and young people are pushed aside and their voice ignored or overlooked.

Our Gospel reading also provides the key to understanding how we as Christians - whether privileged or overlooked or some mix of the two - are called to relate to those the world overlooks, and how God relates to those the world overlooks.

The key is in the Magnificat, the Song of Mary: 'He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants for ever'.

God does not see those the world overlooks as the world sees them. God does not see the world as the mighty in the world see themselves. The proud are humbled, the powerful knocked down, the lowly lifted, the rich emptied, the hungry filled.

While the world rejects or tortures or humiliates, God embraces, sanctifies, and lifts up.

What does this mean for us gathered here at St Peter's this morning?

Who do we overlook?

Whose voices are we marginalising or pushing aside?

Do we ourselves and our community as God sees them?

At the heart of our celebration of Christmas is a tiny and all-too-easy to overlook baby, in a forgotten and all-too-easy to overlook corner of an Empire, in a small and all-too-easy to overlook town. The pressures and worries of Christmas can sometimes make it all-too-easy to overlook those God is calling us to notice.

This Christmas let us notice those God is calling us to notice, to pay particular attention to those the world overlooks, to come close to Christ in those who lack power, the poor, the hungry, the lowly and overlooked, even as he comes close to us now in the bread and wine of this Eucharist.