

Christmas Day Sermon 2021

The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. Words from our Gospel reading from the Gospel according to St John, the first chapter, the 14th verse. May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace who brings 'good news'.

I don't know about you but I suspect this Christmas especially - amidst all of the uncertainty and anxiety of the next few weeks - we all need to hear some 'good news'.

'Good news' is at the heart of the Christian story. In Matthew's Gospel the angel announces to the shepherds: 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.'

The Christian Gospel is good news, literally. Our word 'Gospel' means 'good news'. The Gospel has at its heart the good news of God's birth as one of us, the good news of his death for all of us, the good news that God loves each and every one of us more than we can possibly imagine or ever possibly love ourselves. God loves you. Yes, you.

Whatever life throws at us, however uncertain the days and weeks to come, we have this good news. 'Do not be afraid: for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy'.

Sometimes, however, it can be difficult to see or comprehend this good news. We get weighed down by guilt

or by how we see ourselves or by our fear of how others see us. We struggle to believe that God can love us as we as we really are. We find the bad news all around us drowns out this good news. Family pressures, concerns about our finances, the stress of work, troubles with our or loved ones health, loneliness and isolation - all of these and more besides can reduce the sound of the good news of Christmas to the merest whisper.

When we find ourselves struggling. When we find the whisper of the good news of God's love for us drowned out against the bustle of everyday life, our Gospel reading this morning helps to return us to the source of the good news we celebrate this morning.

'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.'

God - the creator of all that is - enters the very world he made, born as one of us in Christ. God - the sustainer of all that is, who holds all of creation in being - enters into the noise and bustle of this world.

Whenever we struggle, whenever we find ourselves in need of good news, whenever we find the good news of Christ difficult to hear amidst all of the busyness and pressure of life, we can return here. To the crib. To the tiny whisper of all that this child is and will do for us. To the first tiny whimper of God's life as one of us. This is the good news we celebrate today.

God became one of us that first Christmas, and now comes to us again in the bread and wine of this and every eucharist. In a world and a time sorely in need of good news, this is the good news we need to hear. Amen.

I've asked someone to read 'Christmas' by John Betjeman, a poem which reflects on today's good news, and helps us

*hear again that whisper of good news amidst the clamour
and bustle of life and all its uncertainty.*

Christmas - John Betjeman

The bells of waiting Advent ring,
The Tortoise stove is lit again
And lamp-oil light across the night
Has caught the streaks of winter rain
In many a stained-glass window sheen
From Crimson Lake to Hookers Green.

The holly in the windy hedge
And round the Manor House the yew
Will soon be stripped to deck the ledge,
The altar, font and arch and pew,
So that the villagers can say
'The church looks nice' on Christmas Day.

Provincial Public Houses blaze,
Corporation tramcars clang,
On lighted tenements I gaze,
Where paper decorations hang,
And bunting in the red Town Hall
Says 'Merry Christmas to you all'.

And London shops on Christmas Eve
Are strung with silver bells and flowers
As hurrying clerks the City leave
To pigeon-haunted classic towers,
And marbled clouds go scudding by
The many-steepled London sky.

And girls in slacks remember Dad,
And oafish louts remember Mum,
And sleepless children's hearts are glad.
And Christmas-morning bells say 'Come!'
Even to shining ones who dwell
Safe in the Dorchester Hotel.

And is it true? And is it true,
This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,
A Baby in an ox's stall ?
The Maker of the stars and sea
Become a Child on earth for me ?

And is it true ? For if it is,
No loving fingers tying strings
Around those tissue'd fripperies,
The sweet and silly Christmas things,
Bath salts and inexpensive scent
And hideous tie so kindly meant,

No love that in a family dwells,
No carolling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this single Truth compare -
That God was man in Palestine

And lives today in Bread and Wine.