

Morningside Talk 10am 25/12/21

Christmas Day

The boy who makes the stars

Psalm 98; John 1:1-14

In January 2018 I was privileged to visit the Holy Land and Jordan on an official trip representing the Church of Scotland. We stayed in Jerusalem and Tiberias and Amman. I visited the war-ravaged streets of Gaza. I visited both sides of the River Jordan where Jesus was baptised. I visited olive tree collectives and a half-way house for men being released from prison into the community. I spoke with senior Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian politicians. I visited the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which is said to cover not only the site of Calvary where Jesus was crucified, but the Garden Tomb where He rose from the dead on Easter Day. I spoke to farmers and archbishops and soldiers and hotel workers and shopkeepers and rabbis and a King and Prince of Jordan.

On this Christmas Day today I recall a moving visit to Bethlehem. I met the boy who made stars! And the olive wood crosses I used as my moderatorial gifts.

The stars are made from olive wood from Nablus and I used them as the gift I am shared with children and young people. The holding crosses, made from the same wood in Bethlehem workshops, remind me to this day, of holding Christmas and Easter in my hand at the same time. The stars remind me of the place of Jesus' birth, the story of the Magi and the star they followed as they travelled to encounter the Saviour.

I was taken to meet George and his son Elias in Bethlehem in their workshop. Elias has some learning difficulties, but he also has the skill and concentration and the dexterity to make these tiny olive wood stars. I was happy to pass on a gift from Scotland. He'll be one of the few young men in Bethlehem who has a Church of Scotland tartan bow tie.

I watched Elias working away, quietly and skilfully, and then he looked up and held his hand out to me and said, "I am the boy who makes the stars."

In our hands, those little wooden stars, speaking of the birth and the light of Jesus.

I have often wondered what happened to Elias. Bethlehem is a challenging place for Christians today, as are many other communities in Israel. Yet still there are decent Jews and Muslims and Christians in that land they all call holy, who believe in freedom, and peace, and the possibility of living as different strands of the one great family of faith who follow the living God.

The boy who makes the stars. The boy who gives the remembrance of light and hope and joy that is the beating heart of the Christmas message.

On this busiest and quietest of days, beyond the gifts and the meals and the visits and the zoom calls and the walks in the fresh air and the entertainment and the gathering and the isolation, what will you make today?

Will you make thoughts and words and actions that will bring light and hope and joy? Will you make peace and kindness?

Will you be like Elias, the boy who makes the stars, so that today, this Christmas Day, we can remember the birth of the Saviour, and give our deepest-down, heartfelt thanks?

May it be so. May it be so.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen