

Morningside Sermon 10am 25/12/23

Christmas Day

Living among us

Isaiah 52:7-10; John 1:1-14

After the long build-up to the big day, for some people there is a potential for Christmas Day to be anti-climactic. The big event was last night, when four weeks of Advent waiting culminated for many with the darkness of the night, and the shining lights, and all 55 verses of the First Noël, and the announcement that Christmas Eve has flicked over into Christmas Day, and we all wished each other a Merry Christmas. This morning, those with children and grandchildren have been up since 4am and maybe have come here for a little snooze, whilst others take a moment to catch their breath before launching into the most judged meal of the year, upon which your culinary prowess may rise or fall.

Maybe it is no bad thing that we have this little pause after weeks of build up before whatever lies ahead. As if we were at the surprisingly still eye of the storm of life where divinity meets humanity and we pause and ponder, with Mary, what is this really all about? What has just happened, where God, in Jesus, decisively if vulnerably enters our world.

Not that we abandon the traditional images of Mary and Joseph and Jesus in the manger this morning, but our readings offer a different perspective on what incarnation, God becoming flesh really means. The Spanish call it *Christe con carne*, God with meat on, which sounds a rather more practical culinary approach to theology! What it points to is the fact that incarnation, at Christmas, is about God getting involved with earth, with creation, with humanity.

Isaiah has this wonderful image in v10 that tells us, 'The Lord has bared His holy arm'. For ancient Israelites hoping to be freed from years of exile, God is taking action in the world and rolling His

sleeves up. Not a God sitting at a distance ringing a little bell to summon angels and tell them what needs doing, but God rolling up His sleeves and getting stuck in. It's not an image I'd ever thought about before. God in marigolds, tackling the washing of humanity's sin by rolling up His sleeves. I might be one we shouldn't forget, humorous, but, quite literally, a hands-on image of the divine enterprise of God, women and men working at what needs to be done in the world today, together. In the days before dishwashers, remember those production lines at the sink after Christmas dinner. One scraping the food off the plates; one washing the plates and putting them on a rack; one picking up and drying them; one stacking them tidily or putting them away. Many hands making like work. 'The Lord has bared His holy arm'. God getting involved in the sometimes messy work of our world and our lives. Practical, present, engaged, down-to-earth. That's incarnation. That's God with us. That's Christmas.

John's Gospel gives us another image, the mirror image of what we have in Luke's Gospel. Luke tells us when Joseph and Mary arrive in Bethlehem, there is no room for them in the inn. John confirms this idea when he writes that whilst Jesus came to the world, 'the world knew Him not.' Nevertheless this incarnation of God did not shake the dust from His feet and return to heaven from whence He came. He stayed. Like the star stopping and staying over the place where He was born this, 'Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth...'

On the high days and holidays; on the low days and bleak days, God in Jesus came to dwell with us, to live amongst us. In the spare rooms of our hearts; in the dark closets and cupboards; on the high shelves; in the out houses and garages; in the kitchens and bedrooms and drawing rooms and studies; God in Jesus comes to dwell with us, to live amongst us. Practical, present, engaged, down-to-earth. That's incarnation. That's God with us. That's Christmas.

God rolling up His sleeves. God coming to stay with us. God present, God here. God now. This Christmas Day, for every one of you, and for me.

Practical, present, engaged, down-to-earth. That's incarnation. That's God with us. That's Christmas.

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

Amen