

## **Christmas Eve Sermon 2015**

Our well known Christmas story has been re-enacted again this year through Bible stories, carols and nativity plays. Some of it we could recite word for word. But I'm told that there is no inn in Luke's Gospel, despite all the carols and nativity plays we know. It's all down to translation and interpretation, the word is more usually used for a guest room, or a share of the one roomed house that people lived in, as the rule of hospitality amongst the Jews was so prominent.

Also it is unlikely Bethlehem had an inn. As these were few and far between, usually on long stretches of roads between towns as in the story of the Good Samaritan when the word for inn was used. (Paula Gooder 'Journey to the Manger'). But these are only details, beloved details but still details. The important part of the story is that God came to earth as a baby, a vulnerable human baby, just as we were once.

The miracle is that the "Word made flesh", the one who had been since the beginning of time,

came to earth for us. At that time everything changed, nothing would ever be the same again. The Christmas story is the key to what the world is about, from beginning to end. God's love is Son – shaped. God the Son will bring everything to fulfilment. The Incarnation tells us that this is what we are here for – to be drawn into dialogue with God, hearing his word and responding to it.

It was a time of earth shattering significance for the world, but also for each one of us personally. Jesus comes to us in the untidy, muddled, unsettled world, the real world, the one that we live in. A world we can recognise and identify with, a woman giving birth, plans going awry, strangers supporting us when sometimes family can't.

That is why the birth story is so important to us individually as well as on a global scale. There are some important truths about our faith to be found in it, the story of a God who loves us, who is prepared to risk everything to live amongst us in human form, who drew the most unlikely

people to follow him by doing this and continues today to seek to draw people from all walks of life. I found this piece of poetry:

'You won't need a special star.

I'm no longer just in Bethlehem,

I'm right where you are.

You may not be aware of me,

amid the celebrations.

You'll have to look beyond the stores,

and all the decorations.

But if you take a moment,

from your list of things to do,

and listen to your heart,

you'll find I'm waiting there for you.

You're the reason that I came.

And you'll find me in the stillness,

as I'm whispering your name.' (Anon.)

John tells us that 'The world came into being through him; the world did not know him' they didn't hear that whisper. This is because God gave us choice, we can choose between darkness, death, and light which gives us life.

And yet many, people don't make an informed choice, a conscious decision; perhaps, as the reading above suggests, the distractions of life mean that choosing to love God doesn't get thought about particularly, it is easier to get caught up in life and all the things we do than it is to listen to that whisper. Perhaps others think they have made the choice because they go to church on Sundays.

But the Christmas story is about making it real. The tough decisions that Mary and Joseph had to make to obey God. The shepherds, the Kings all playing their parts, the pain of child birth, the occupied country they lived in, the need for water, food and shelter.

Our faith is about a real relationship with the living God, a relationship in which we are our true selves underneath all the show that we put

on for others. A relationship with someone who loves us unconditionally, who will always love us. A God who loves us so much that he came to earth to live among us. A God who allows us to choose. We can choose to recognise the life-giving power of the Creator in the baby Jesus, in his life, his cross and his resurrection. We can choose light and life.