

Monday 24th December 2018
Christmas Eve (C)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Isaiah 52.7-10

NT: Hebrews 1.1-74

G: John 1.1-14

You see a present with your name on under the Christmas tree. Immediately your attention is drawn. The anticipation of what it might be begins to build. The present looks so exciting, it might well be the thing you've been wanting for ages. At last, all the hints you've dropped have paid off, you've finally been listened to. Christmas arrives and the time comes to open the presents. You pick up your present, tear off the paper and

It's not the gift you've wanted after all. You're not even sure what it is. Now there are 3 choices before you.

You can be rude to the person who bought your present. You can tell them how disappointed you are that it's not what you wanted and you can leave the gift where it is.

You can lie to the person and say that this is wonderful, what you were hoping for, what you've always wanted. And you can take your gift home, put it away and never look at it again.

Or you can be honest, explain that this is a surprise, ask for more information about what this really is and thank the person for giving you something so unexpected.

Your experience of a longed for gift which turned out to be something completely different is not unlike that of the chosen people of God as they anticipated the coming of the Messiah. For centuries the Jewish people had waited for the one who would be sent by God to rescue them.

Over time they had been slaves in Egypt, subject to the misrule of their own kings on their return to the Promised Land. They had been taken into exile by the Babylonians, had lost homes and land and in these days of Herod were subject not only to his vicious rule but to the tyranny of the Roman Empire. The Jewish people longed for a Saviour, a mighty warrior who would help them to rise up and shake of the shackles of slavery. They wanted a man of power and authority, a strong leader who would overcome the Roman army and lead the Jews to victory.

And in time, some two thousand years ago, God did indeed fulfil his promise and sent his Messiah to rescue all humanity. Not from any earthly power, but from the power of death and the darkness of sin. God sent life and light. And when the paper was removed from God's gift it revealed not a mighty warrior but a new born baby. And even when this baby grew to be a man, he didn't bring weapons and warriors to fight but he came armed with the knowledge of the love of God for all his creation. This was not the gift that most people were hoping for.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

There were many who were rude and rejected God's gift and not just rejected it but actively sought to destroy it through the crucifixion. Others were more ambivalent, couldn't be bothered either way and metaphorically put God's gift away in a drawer and hoped that the present they had always wanted would finally arrive another time. But there were those who were intrigued, honest enough to admit that this was not what they had expected, were unsure as to what exactly

God had given them. But they realised it was a gift of great worth and in time they came to value this treasure.

Peter, that great disciple of Jesus who so struggled at times to see what was before him. Peter who believed in Jesus as the Messiah but still felt that this gift of God should look and behave very differently to this man, Jesus. Peter, after the resurrection of Jesus, could finally, succinctly describe this indescribable gift from God.

By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

This Christmas Day and every day, God gives again the gift of his Son in our lives.

There are still those who feel that this is a worthless present, who argue that if God were real, homeless people would not be dying on our streets, working families would not need Foodbanks to feed themselves, churches would be filled with saints and not sinners. If God is so almighty why is this world not a better place?

There are others who don't see the point of it. God is for old ladies and those with nothing better to do on a Sunday morning. God just isn't relevant in our modern world. Thanks very much but this just isn't for me so into the back of a drawer it will go.

But what about us? Well we are disillusioned if we think that believing in God will save us from any hardship, from illness, from suffering, The gift of Jesus Christ in our lives is not something soft and fluffy, it's not a shelter from all that is wrong in this world, it will not make us rich and successful by human standards. The gift of Jesus Christ in our lives is the gift of light shining in the darkness.

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

We have this light so that we can, by the grace of God, do something to help the homeless, to feed the hungry, to right the wrongs of this world.

So I pray that we all accept God's gift this Christmas. It won't necessarily be what we were expecting or hoping for. It might lead us down a path we had never anticipated taking but we will go knowing that we do not journey alone, that we have been given a gift of exceptional value, that we are no longer alone but members of God's family.

To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God

The Revd Michelle Montrose