

**OT: Isaiah 52:7-10**

**NT: Hebrews 1:1-4**

**Gp: John 1:1-14**

Homelessness is, according to the BBC, spiraling way out of control. Petrol prices will never be what they used to be, the Middle East is in turmoil, Ukraine is still fighting for its survival, the world has a huge refugee crisis on its hands and who knows what a second term for President Trump might bring. I think that I can say quite confidently that we're living in challenging times.

Here in our crib, we have a baby born to a poor, young unmarried mother. She gave birth in a stable having travelled a long way from her home on a donkey. Google maps tells me that Nazareth to Bethlehem is ninety miles. Google maps also tells me that it is a thirty-one hour walk. I'm not sure how much time you would need to add on for being heavily pregnant. Mary has only Joseph for company. Neither her mother nor any midwife is mentioned in the nativity narrative. She and Joseph are going to find out that it is not safe to return to their home and, therefore, they will become refugees in another country. I think that that is a very frightening and challenging situation for anybody to be in.

But now in John's gospel we hear the proclamation that this baby is the Word made flesh. We hear that the Word has existed since the very beginning, since before the creation of the world. We hear that the Word created everything that is.

So Jesus doesn't begin to exist at Christmas. Jesus has always been. Jesus takes on human form and comes to live among us at Christmas. *"God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father"*. Jesus has two natures - one fully divine and the other fully human.

In the Old Testament we read of God being present in the holy of holies in the tabernacle and later, the temple. But now in Jesus Christ, God has come to live among us, to live side by side with us, he has come to know human joy and happiness, to know human pain, suffering and despair. He has come so that, *"we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul"* (Heb. 6:18-19).

This, then, is *"the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation"* (Is. 52:7), yet this baby is more than a messenger. He is peace, he is good news, he is salvation.

He comes to what is his own, and many of his own people still do not accept him. God gave us free will and He gave us the option to choose right or wrong. There is an old maxim that says that if you really love someone you should set them free. And so, God gives us the freedom to love him or not to love him. If we didn't have that freedom of choice, if we had no option but to love God then what kind of love would that be? It seems to me that we would simply be going through the motions.

But God wouldn't do that to us because he loves us. One of the recurring themes throughout the whole of John's gospel is that we have to choose. We can choose the light or we can choose darkness. But it is the darkness that was over everything before God created. It is formlessness, it is hopelessness, it is ignorance of the purpose of our existence.

But why was Jesus born? He was born so that we might know God. What greater way for God to "*bare his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations*" than to take on human form and walk amongst his people.

*"... to all who receive him, who believe in his name, he gives power to become children of God, who are born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God."* So we must make up our minds to receive him. As a recent meme on social media tells me, "*each of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is room in our lives for Jesus*".

Having made room for Jesus we need to invite others to come and meet him and to see for themselves the light and hope that he is to the whole world.

I have heard people say that it is not the Anglican way to talk about Jesus. What is it that we are afraid of? Let us stop being so Anglican and share the good news of Jesus Christ with the whole world. Because what better news is there than the gospel? There is no better news.

Jesus is not like a bar of chocolate where if I share it with a friend, I have less chocolate for myself. If I share the good news of Jesus with a friend or, better still, a stranger I have more of Jesus for myself than I did beforehand.

As we approach the new year, I wonder how many of us will make new year's resolutions. Of those who do, I wonder what proportion will include a resolution to come to know Jesus better - and a resolution to share Jesus with others.

It's Christmas and time to celebrate the greatest gift in the history of great gifts. "*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift*" (2 Cor. 9:15).

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