

Readings and sermon for Sunday 27th of December, Christmas 1

(Diocesan service was used online but no transcript was provided so we have decided to publish a sermon for those who don't have internet access to be able to access a sermon)

Collect

Almighty God,
who wonderfully created us in your own image
and yet more wonderfully restored us
through your Son Jesus Christ:
grant that, as he came to share in our humanity,
so we may share the life of his divinity;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

⁶² For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.

² The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.

³ You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Galatians 4:4 – 7

⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶ And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our* hearts, crying, 'Abba!* Father!' ⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.*

Luke 2:15 – 21

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

21 After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Sermon by Reverend Susan Williams (Associate Priest)

The same people who were in a rush to get their Christmas decorations up to cheer them up and get into the Christmas spirit are probably taking them down now. The Posada has finished its travels. We've reached the end of the journey and Christmas is over. Or is it? Some of us have barely started to decorate.

In St Luke's story of the Nativity the shepherds have been celebrating a properly COVID-free Christmas in the open air, in the fields outside Bethlehem, in their isolated bubble they've been visited by angels (safely distanced and clearly non-infectious). They've heard the message of good news and great joy for all people. Carols of peace and goodwill have been heard. So that's over.

What do they do with this information? How do they act on it?

They set out to make a visit to one other household to see for themselves this thing that has happened, to share the wonder and delight at this new and life-changing birth, so full of hope, despite the unpromising setting and the fragility of a tiny baby. Then they return to their usual duties, spreading the word as they go. And so, they pass out of the story. We don't know what further difference their experience will make in their lives.

But Luke tells us, before they go they share their part of the story with Mary, who receives it as a treasure and stores it safely in heart and mind. She'll be able to think about their words, reflect on them, and act on them in the years to come, as the baby Jesus grows up in her care. Christmas is not over for Mary. Because, of course, the story of Jesus doesn't end there; Jesus can't stay as a baby in a manger, important as it is that he should, like us, be born of a woman and brought up in all the traditions of the law. The promise and hope can't be fulfilled unless he grows up.

I don't know what your experience of Christmas this year has been. Perhaps like the shepherds you've been out to visit loved ones, perhaps you haven't. Every year the Christmas season means delight and harmony for some; every year others suffer from loneliness, discord, even despair. In the uncertainties of our rapidly changing world, in the losses suffered or feared, we know there will have been more this year. The only good news about that is that perhaps we're more aware and readier to help if we can.

But the message of the angels is unchanged. Like Mary, we can carry it in our hearts as we reflect and act upon it, and upon our whole COVID experience. Promise and hope and goodwill remain. Despite disappointments and deprivations, despite fears for churches and communities, seeds of love and hope are there, waiting to grow and blossom.

In this baby we too become aware that we are God's children. No-one – not even a deadly virus – has the power to make slaves of us. Salvation will keep on breaking out, in the most unexpected places and people. We are joyful recipients. Can we become heirs of God, active in spreading the joy? Can we ensure that Christmas is not over?