

25th December St. German's Cathedral

Isaiah 9: 2-7 Luke 2:1-14

+

May my words and your hearing be in the hands of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

Well this is a Christmas like no other any of us has ever experienced. Normally I gaze out from the pulpit and see families united – coming home from different parts of the world to be together for Christmas. For some of you this year there will be family members missing - separated as a result of the pandemic.

From the Cathedral point of view - uniquely we are the only Cathedral in the British Isles able to function in anything like a normal way, with no social distancing, congregational singing permitted, a choir in place which doesn't have to be miles apart as they sing.

We are indeed fortunate, living in a bubble of 85,000 people as opposed to the tiny

family bubbles in the rest of the British Isles. Bubbles may allow a little relaxation for Christmas Day and then they are back to tighter restrictions the next day. There is of course the underlying fear that this Christmas relaxation will put new pressure on the NHS.

Turning to the world of Jesus's day and its traumas, we see Mary and Joseph being required by government decree (like the rest of the Jewish population) to up-sticks in Nazareth and travel to Bethlehem, a distance not far short of 100 miles, for taxation purposes – with everyone on the move travelling back to their ancestral homes for the census.

Mary and Joseph had to leave the security of family for a place they were not familiar with and with Mary heavily pregnant. Divorced from the support of family Mary had her baby in a stable because of overcrowding in Bethlehem as people returned to their roots.

Many of you during this year will have found yourself separated from family support. Perhaps with relatives stuck in England or other parts of the world; perhaps because you had to isolate for 7 or 14 days, remaining in the confines of your house or apartment as you returned from a break or even basic medical treatment in the UK.

Some of you may have discovered living alone with yourself for the first time, which will have had its own challenges.

Perhaps some have had space to ask some of the bigger questions in life –

- What's the purpose of Life?
- What are my priorities?
- How much is humanity actually in control of our world?
- How can humanity sustain itself into the future?

Salvation from Covid seems to be offered through science rather than God.

The reality is that science and Christianity are not enemies, but rather partners – both are searching for the truth and trying to rise to the challenge of the questions we face.

God, does not want ill to become of any of his children, but neither does he want us to disregard the cries of the earth as humanity puts increasing pressure on the one world we have to live in.

There are so many areas of our world where we have pressed the 'self-destruct' button and we are reaping the consequences. Just to give one example, unless we reduce our carbon footprint, then the consequences for humanity will be catastrophic.

Science can be our partner and friend in rescuing us from these consequences, but we humans have to also play our part in changing our behaviour – and that's where science and Christianity join forces to try and make a better world, a world fit for the

next generation and the one beyond, and so on.

So back to that child, born in a stable 2000 years ago.

God has come to the humanity he/she has created and chosen to limit his infinite power within the frame of a human-being in order to give us mortals hope and direction.

God shows us a world where there are no outsiders. The visitors to the Christ-child were shepherds, who were, as far as society was concerned, the scum that lived on the margins. He was also visited by the Magi, outsiders of a different kind – un-kosher gentiles with a dodgy profession as star-gazers, who Judaism would have no truck with.

Christ offers hope for our world, not for some exclusive Christian club, but for all humanity.

For God:

- All are family – peoples from one end of the world to another
- All are family - from the humblest to the noblest of living things

Today we celebrate the hope born in a stable who embraces all creation as our sister and brother and loves us literally to the point of death (and beyond), but that is for Easter.

I wish you a very happy Christmas.

+

760