

Christ in all things at Christmas

A sermon preached by Revd Bridges on 23 December 2019, the fourth Sunday of Advent, after the Children's Nativity play

Refs: Micah 5.2-5a; Hebrews 10.5-10; Luke 1.39-45

One of the wonderful things about Christmas is that we can look again at its meaning, in different ways and on different levels. We sing carols, attend Nativity plays and carol services, and have lots of Bible readings to choose from for our many services. At Midnight Mass and in our Carol service we'll hear the wonderful words of St John, from the prologue to his Gospel, *"In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and the Word WAS God.... and then the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."*

Those words seem to have a power of their own that strikes deep into our soul, even though we may not have any idea what they really mean! For some people this is enough. They are content just to be moved by them in their mystery. Other people will be inspired to spend time trying to understand their deeper meaning. These words are the basis for many theological sermons.

Today we heard some very different words - words that we can all understand on a very simple level. God sent his angel to ask Mary to be the bearer of his Son. God - the Creator of the heavens and the earth, God all-powerful, eternal, timeless, infinite, became flesh as a tiny powerless baby. Of course there are many very 'theological' sermons that can be preached about this, but there is a simple message we can take from this. God loves us so much that he was prepared to make himself powerless in order that we might love him back. If he had come in power and might this would have produced fear. When Jesus resisted the temptations to take up his power or do wonderful miracles, he was reaffirming God's desire to come in love and humility. God doesn't want us to follow him because we're afraid of him. He wants us to follow him because we love him. He put aside power, might, glory for a season, in order to prove to us how much he loves us.

When we see the Christmas story acted out by children, our hearts are particularly moved to love. This apparently simple story of Christ's birth is told over and over again in countless places throughout the world, in carol services, nativity plays, on Christmas cards and in carols played endlessly in shops! Because of this, it is heard by millions of people of every race, creed and colour, most of whom will never attend a church.

We're often tempted to complain about the way Christmas is celebrated these days. About the way it's become so worldly, commercial, about spending money and getting things. Amazingly, in spite of all this, it retains a message of good will, of love, and a sense that there is something very special at the heart of this season. We may not think this is enough, that God can only reach people if they come to church, but we know that God moves in mysterious ways. I suspect he knows what he's doing. He can reach out to people wherever they are. So at Christmas he's at work in all those presents people buy for each other, in those carols we hear, in the carol services, in the nativity plays. He's there in the love that people feel, in the extra generosity people show at this time. And he's there in the sadness and pain that Christmas can bring which highlights loneliness, poverty, illness, bereavement, the many difficulties of life. God became human, he was born in poverty, exiled, tortured, so he knows about pain and sadness and walks with all those who suffer, not just at Christmas.

At Christmas, God moves us in many ways. Through that simple story of a baby born in a stable, or in those words of St John's Gospel that move us in such a deep profound way that we don't really understand. He's in acts of kindness, and in the fun of the tambourines playing 'jingle bells'. In whatever way we mark Christmas, I pray that each one of us may find a verse, a moment in the Christmas story, a particular action, that speaks to us as someone deeply, unconditionally loved by God, which moves us to love him.

Amen

Revd Viv Bridges