

Christmas 2020

It is been a strange and difficult year for us all. Yet although it may be the strangest year that many of us remember, other times and places have been difficult too. Consider the circumstances of the birth of Jesus, both in terms of what was going on in the country of his birth (Roman occupation, people having to travel to register in the census) and also more specifically in the lives of Mary and Joseph.

If Mary and Joseph had the time to think back a year from the birth of Jesus they would have been a betrothed couple looking forward to married life. Life would change dramatically for them both with the messages from the angels announcing the coming birth of a son to Mary. This year the Feast of the Annunciation coincided with the beginning of the first lockdown, the moment in which our lives were overturned, and the plans which we might have made for the rest of this year suddenly having to change. Another parallel might be the scenes we have seen at the train stations in London last weekend or at Dover this week, people anxious to travel and not necessarily having anywhere safe to rest or stay, and the situation of Mary and Joseph as they have to travel to Bethlehem for the census. I am sure there will be more than one Christmas baby delivered in unexpected circumstances this year.

I draw these parallels to make the point that if we feel lost and disorientated in a world that seems to be in chaos then we need to remember that it was a similar situation that God chose for the Incarnation, the coming into the world of Jesus, the Word made flesh. God chose to enter among us not in majesty and glory, but in humility and poverty. Jesus was not robed in cloth of gold but wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, but the one thing he did not lack was the love of Mary and Joseph who in their different ways would protect and guide him as he was to grow to maturity.

The coronavirus pandemic has had a great effect of all of our society and has brought out both the best and the worst in people. I am sure we can all remember the scenes of people buying up a year's supply of toilet rolls in one go, I am sure we can also remember many acts of kindness, generosity, and love shown by so many people not only to their loved ones but to strangers too. If we are to ask, 'where is God in all this?' then I think it is in those acts of love that we will find him, and in acts done and received in love both the giver and the recipient are blessed with a sharing in God's love towards us all.

The pandemic will have affected us all in different ways. Some will have been ill themselves or will have lost loved ones to Covid. Others will be among key workers who have continued working throughout the pandemic often putting themselves at risk to keep others safe. We regularly showed our appreciation in the early part of the pandemic and it is good to renew that appreciation at this time of the year too. Others may have lost work and be facing up to difficult prospects for next year. Children and young people will have had their education disrupted. Whatever our own particular situation we pray for one another in our different needs at this time.

Christmas is a time for saying 'thank you' to all who serve and minister in the parish community in so many ways. This year I would particularly like to thanks those who have

made it possible for the church to reopen and for us to have a congregation present for Mass once again. Our team of stewards is the public facing side of this ministry and I hope I can thank them on all our behalf for their work, as well as a number of others who have worked behind the scenes too. I am also conscious that we continue to be a 'split' congregation with some present in person in the church and others joining us by livestream. I know that through the livestream we have reconnected with former parishioners and found new ones and you too are very much part of our celebration at this time.

May God bless each and everyone of you and your loved ones at this Christmas season and however messy and chaotic our prospects for 2021 might seem at the moment may we remember that it is in the midst of the mess and chaos that we are most likely to encounter God who in Jesus came to dwell among us.