

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 187

Christmas Day December 2022

‘Virtually Church but with some way to go...’

Welcome

Happy Christmas!

What follows are the readings and reflection from the Camelot midnight service at North Cadbury.

Scripture Passages

Isaiah 52: 7-10

How beautiful upon the mountains

are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,

who announces salvation,

who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

⁸ Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,

together they sing for joy;

for in plain sight they see

the return of the LORD to Zion.

⁹ Break forth together into singing,

you ruins of Jerusalem;

for the LORD has comforted his people,

he has redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰ The LORD has bared his holy arm

before the eyes of all the nations;

and all the ends of the earth shall see

the salvation of our God.

John 1: 1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Reflection

So after all the preparations we have arrived. Or almost. By the time we have celebrated Communion we will be able to sing with conviction the final verse of O come, all ye faithful. Yea, Lord we greet thee, born this happy morning. For by then it will really and truly be Christmas morning.

But in the meantime, my thanks to all of you who have made the effort to come here at this beautiful and mysterious time of night. And although I could of course be wrong my guess is that many or even most of you are pretty organised kinds of people.

I don't know what lies ahead for each of you in the celebrations for Christmas Day and yet by coming here tonight you have recognised that whatever these may bring the first and most crucial thing for you to do is to recognise the spiritual significance of Christmas. Jesus Christ is born today. Once we acknowledge that profound and central truth in an appropriate way all the other aspects of Christmas will fall into their proper place.

So organised and prepared. And that is commendable. We want to be ready and we do not want to be taken by surprise. As we have approached Christmas we have been journeying through the church season of Advent. And in Advent we are encouraged to get ready for the coming of Christ and we are warned against being taken by surprise by when Christ does come to us.

But having said all that is it possible for us to be too prepared?

Because when we are too prepared, there is a danger that we lose the spontaneity of living in the moment. We try to make everything work like clockwork and the only problem with that is that we are not pieces in a clock.

Sometimes it is when our plans are overturned that we find an unexpected joy in what arises unplanned and on the spur of the moment.

Earlier this week I was officiating at a pre-Christmas wedding. And as with the vast majority of the weddings that I have taken this one had clearly been meticulously and extensively planned. The bride even arrived at the West Door before I did! And yet at the very end the plans didn't quite seem to work. After the blessing I motioned to bride and groom to turn round for the final procession. I expected music and movement. Instead there was silence and everyone was frozen.

What had happened? The plan was that a recorded song was going to be played on our sound system. And as ever when this is about to happen we disclaim responsibility for it. We say, if you have someone in your wedding party who is willing and able to do this please do go ahead. But we don't have the technical expertise.

And so silence. The recording simply did not work. And yet all was not lost. At that moment our organist spontaneously broke into a rendering of a wedding prelude which he knew off by heart.

It was spontaneous. And joyful and appropriate.

However, if we have become too rigid in our thinking, believing that everything has to work in exactly the way we expected it to, then we can miss this joy of spontaneity.

During Advent we have looked at various people who prepared the way for the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Two of these have been John the Baptist and Mary, the mother of our Lord.

John the Baptist has been mentioned in our reading from John's gospel.
⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

In Advent we studied a passage where John was in prison and beginning to doubt that Jesus really was the promised Messiah to whom he was to bear witness. We do not know exactly what caused these doubts but perhaps it was because John's expectations of what the Messiah was to be like had become too rigid. He had built up a fixed idea in his mind of what the Messiah should be like and when he found that Jesus did not match up to these expectations then he began to doubt that Jesus really was who He said He was. He had moved ahead of himself in his planning and

preparation and was not willing to allow God to surprise Him by the way in which He actually came.

Thankfully, John recovered from this and when he was asked to look again at what Jesus was doing He recovered His faith.

Sadly, however, this is not always the case. Our reading from John's gospel contains a warning against persisting in preconceived ideas of what Jesus should be like and failing to recognise when Christ has actually come to us. For, ¹⁰ *He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.* ¹¹ *He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.*

How tragic it was that God's own people, those who should have been and in many ways were most prepared for the coming of the Messiah simply did not accept Him. Maybe He did not live up to their preconceived expectations.

But there is a different and more fruitful path to follow and that is exemplified for us by Mary, the mother of our Lord. Mary, like any mother, certainly had to plan and prepare for the birth of her son. And yet Mary was also willing to be surprised by God, to have her own plans and expectations overturned, and to allow God to work out His plans in His way. Even if it was not hers.

She welcomed God and Christ into her heart without reservation. So she exemplifies those who in the words of John's gospel truly receive Christ, ¹² *But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,* ¹³ *who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.*

Do we have the same capacity as Mary to receive what God has for us? For at Christmas we celebrate that the Word became flesh and lived among us. As we receive that truth so Christ comes to be born and to live in our hearts.

Yes, it is good to be prepared for Christmas and to put its spiritual meaning at the heart of our celebrations. But how is it that we think that we will meet Jesus? Well, yes, obviously in this service and most of all in the sharing of the bread and wine at Communion which reminds us of Christ's body and blood given for us.

But are there other ways in which Jesus will come to us? Ways which we have not prepared for and which we do not expect. And yet ways which if we are open to them will indeed bring us tidings of great comfort and joy. Jesus, after all, may come to us in the form of an unexpected guest.

I end with another account of ministry during the past week. At one of our Camelot villages a great deal of work had gone into preparing a carol service. But then the unexpected happened. Because of condensation there was neither heat nor light in the church. The carol service simply could not happen and as congregation members arrived this was the message that had to be given.

And yet over the road, in the Reading Room, there was both heat and light. And mince pies and mulled wine were being served. So I took myself off over the road. And as I did so I got into a conversation with a young family whom I had never met before. I was told that they were refugees from the Ukraine to whom a member of the village had generously opened his heart and home. It was a humbling experience.

And as I went home I asked myself where I had met Jesus on that evening? Yes, it was disappointing that the carol service had had to be cancelled. But despite all this, I could not help thinking that I had met Jesus in the form both of the stranger and of the generosity of the person who had opened their home to the stranger.

Jesus will come to us. Jesus has come to us this Christmas. Are we ready? I hope that we are. But not so ready that we are not able to receive and recognise Jesus in whatever unexpected form He may choose to come to us.

Tristram

Points for Prayers

- Joy in our celebrations of Christmas
- Being open to meeting Christ in unexpected ways
- All those facing hardship this winter, needing to choose between food and heating
- Those seeking to help those facing hardship through projects such as the Lord's Larder and other foodbanks, community fridges and the provision of warm spaces
- Cold weather, its dangers and disruptions
- Resolution to various industrial disputes
- Conflict between Russia and the Ukraine and those who are refugees from this conflict
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds and have recently been bereaved
- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton and its residents as they celebrate Christmas
- For teachers, children and parents of North Cadbury church school in the Christmas holiday period

Carol

Which is your favourite carol? There are many which I like. One which we sang at the midnight service was 'Silent Night'.

Christmas and New Year's Day Services

Sunday 25 th December	9.30 am Christmas Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 25 th December	9.30 am Christmas Communion, Blackford
Sunday 25 th December	9.30 am Christmas Communion, Compton Pauncefoot
Sunday 25 th December	9.30 am Carols and Readings, South Cadbury
Sunday 25 th December	11.00 am Christmas Communion, North Cadbury
Sunday 25 th December	11.00 am Christmas Communion, Holton
Sunday 25 th December	11.00 am Carols and Readings, North Cheriton
Sunday 25 th December	11.00 am Carols and Readings, Maperton
Sunday 1 st January	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 1 st January	9.30 am, Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 1 st January	11.00 am, Group Communion, North Cadbury

Excalibur

Excalibur is back in paper form. It contains details of Camelot people, a record of baptisms, weddings and funerals undertaken through the church in the Camelot Parishes. The December and January editions of Excalibur have now been published online at camelotparishes.co.uk.

The Parish Office

If Rob is not in the Office during normal office hours please contact him via email (office@camelotparishes.org.uk) or on 01749 850934.

Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family

*We pray that 'we might live in love,
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us'*

(Ephesians 5: 2)