

Sermon for December 25th, 2020_

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Readings:

Isaiah 9:2-7

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-20

A warm welcome to you all this Christmas Day. I'm Alice, and I'm serving here at St Mary Abbots as curate. May I speak to you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Once upon a time I was a trainee teacher in the town of Wolverhampton, and I was invited to join my Y7 class for their end of term trip to the Theatre, to see C.S Lewis's: 'The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe'. I sat down next to a little boy called Oliver, who was entranced throughout. Almost at the very end he turned to me, his eyes lit up, and, pointing at the majestic figure of Aslan, whispered loudly, 'Miss! It's Jesus!'.

Oliver had seen, in the person, and actions of Aslan, the person and actions of Jesus. It was an unexpected revelation, Christ made known to a little boy whose eyes shone with a new light as he chattered away to me all the way back to school on the coach.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light – those who lived in a land of deep darkness- on them light has shined. This Christmas Day we celebrate the coming of Christ into a dark and broken world, not just as a story from the past, but as a reality for our present. Because God continues to break through, to reveal himself to people like you and me and Oliver. My prayer for us today is that we are able to lift our eyes, to lift our eyes and SEE the light of Christ that is coming amongst us.

I'm not sure I've ever experienced the sense of grief that I sense in the world around us right now. We've all been through periods of individual loss and pain, but this communal, universal grief is like nothing I've ever known. The whole world is anxious, the whole world is weary, the whole world has experienced a profound change to our way of life, our sense of being, our sense of autonomy. All our relationships have been disrupted in some way, most of our jobs have to be done differently, the language we use has changed, the 'new' normal has never arrived as we all continue to watch hopefully for islands of certainty amidst a sea of absolute uncertainty. Those living alone have never been so isolated, those living with others have never found life so intense. These are dark, confusing, exhausting times.

But the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light – those who lived in a land of deep darkness- on them light has shined. Because amidst all of this, God's light is breaking through. In our isolation we have been required to look hard at ourselves. We've seen aspects of ourselves which we do not like, we have been humbled to reflect on our sin, on our selfishness, and on the ways in which our lives do not reflect the glory of God. We have had to change our ways – what we eat, how we travel, how we connect. We have rediscovered simple joys. Our stubborn hearts have been melted by the Holy Spirit so

that we are more aware of our emotions, our vulnerability as humans, our interdependence on God and on one another. Juxtaposed with our grief has been an unexpected sense of gratitude. We will all have our own personal stories of revelation this year, but one thing is for certain: God has not been absent from us, He has been at work in us and in our world. Forming and shaping us in some weird and wonderful and undoubtedly unexpected ways.

Our Bishop, Graham Tomlin's book 'The Widening Circle', is about the way that God uses the Church to bless the world. I find it a really helpful picture for how we can see and be a part of the action of God in creation, because Bishop Graham sees the birth of Christ as an unfolding of a story of blessing. In the Christmas narrative the baby Jesus is revealed to just a few, and yet his light begins to unfold gradually, transforming the lives of everyone who becomes swept up in this incredible narrative of salvation for all of creation. Bishop Graham reflects especially on Christ's reaching down in a way that is both extraordinary and also very ordinary, in a way that is world changing, and yet seen, at least at first, by just a few. Our reading from Luke's gospel shows this extraordinarily humbling image of this one, tiny baby, in vulnerable circumstances, and yet somehow Jesus Christ's coming among us precipitates a sort of snowball effect of grace and light, where a few, humble hearts, receive Him, respond to Him, tell others of Him, and in so doing change the world. The action of God in Christ is primarily to show us Love, to teach us to love, and to bring about a world where Love reigns.

As 2020 draws to a close there are two narratives we can inhabit. One is of darkness, of pain and grief, of anger. One where all we can see and all we can share is our sadness. One where we look back to what was and see that as our blueprint for the future. And the other is one of light, of hope, of opportunity. Where all we see and all we share is something of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and seek to be His agents of light and love in the world. Just as Mary and Joseph and the shepherds, and all who visited the baby Jesus were touched by God and their hearts moved to love, we too can make this our own narrative, our own response to the vulnerability of the world we inhabit. This narrative of hope is not one we will probably find in our newspaper headlines or on our television screens. It is not a narrative that will be shared by others we know. But, as Greta Thunberg has written this year, 'no one is too small to make a difference'.

We are just a few. A few who have seen the light of Christ, welcomed Him into our hearts, surrendered our lives to Him, known the transformation of life made possible through His grace, and now we are part of this story of redemption, this widening circle of blessing. But everything that we do, however small, in the name of Christ, to offer care, mercy, compassion, generosity, friendship and above all LOVE, everything makes a difference. What a deep joy it is to know that 'the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light – those who lived in a land of deep darkness- on them light has shined'. I pray that God will shine His light afresh in our hearts, that with Oliver we can proclaim 'It's Jesus!' – and know that today Christ has come among us, equipping us to shine as stars in the world for all eternity, to the praise and glory of His name.

Amen.