

25th December 2025

Isaiah 9:2-7, Titus 2: 11-14 and Luke 2:1-14

Mother Emma

“And the time came for the young woman to have her child. And she gave birth to a tiny baby, wrapped him up as warmly and snugly as she could, and put him down to sleep in the safest place she could find.”

This could be a paraphrase of the familiar story we heard just now in our Gospel reading, and which we see depicted here in our Christmas crib scene – the story of the baby wrapped in swaddling bands and lying in a manger.

Or perhaps it is the story of the two hundred or so young women across the world who have given birth to babies since my sermon began – four every second!

Some of these may be in the ruins and rubble of bombed out buildings in Gaza or Yemen; others in vast refugee camps, or in luxury hospitals in the great cities of the world; some may be surrounded by loving families or highly qualified medical professionals, and others alone in agonising isolation and fear.

But in every place a new mother will long to take her child, to wrap it warmly against the elements and to find somewhere safe and snug for it to sleep; she will be grateful if both she and the baby have come through the birth unscathed, she will watch and ponder the earliest events of the child's life, and wonder what will become of this miraculous new life she has brought into the world.

Every day we hear frightening stories of wars and terror attacks and sickness bringing suffering and death, and yet at the same time, the miracle of new life and birth continues unabated.

Beyond the manger, the stable and the angels, the story of the Incarnation is the universal and timeless story of humanity.

As it unfolds, we see the beauty, the joy and the hope of new life on earth, shining out within a world filled with the fears, resentment, conflict and physical suffering which are part and parcel of human existence.

The backdrop of Christ's Nativity is an occupied country, in which the rulers are more concerned with counting the number of people who might be coerced into paying them taxes, than with showing compassion towards those who might find it a hardship to travel, to find accommodation, to be far from home at vulnerable points in their lives.

The shepherds on the hillside remind us of all those regarded as dirty or isolated, invisible, rough or unacceptable, those who work in jobs on which the rest of society depends but fails to appreciate, or who find themselves homeless or jobless and on the very margins of society.

King Herod – fearful and insecure – is neither the first nor the last leader to put the lives of innocent people at risk in order to maintain his shaky power-base, or to persecute those whose strength of faith is seen as a personal threat.

And in the Magi, setting off on their journey, to arrive in twelve days' time on Epiphany Sunday, we see those who commit their lives to study and research; delving into the mysteries of the universe to discover how the history and science of God's world have unfolded and will continue to do so.

They may no longer base their predictions solely on the stars, but the questions they ask, about where we have come from and where we are going, remain the same.

So what do we hear for ourselves in this timeless story of humanity?

Perhaps we identify personally with one of the groups I have mentioned, or we associate them with individuals or social groupings who have featured in the media in recent times.

We may rejoice in the good, yet feel discouraged that human beings continue to make the same mistakes, to be driven by greed or the lust for power, so that history seems to repeat itself in frightening ways.

But this sense can be transformed on Christmas Day by the singing of the angels, and by the message they bring – the message of peace on earth, goodwill to all.

Here we rediscover the eternal truth that the timeless story of humanity is also the timeless story of God.

God made each one of us in his own image, and deep within us lie the seeds of peace and goodwill, with which the Christmas story encourages us to reach out to the world around us.

In taking flesh and sharing with us in all the joys and sorrows, hopes and fears of humanity, Jesus came to remind us that in every human being, we can see that image of God, and within every one of us we can find the love, acceptance and goodwill which God wishes for his Creation, and which will ultimately prove to be the only way we can build a world of compassion and peace and hope.

The Incarnation also tells us we can rest secure in the knowledge that God himself is present, not just at Christmas, but all year round, with every one of us, just as people of all nationalities and social and economic backgrounds were welcomed to kneel together at the manger.

Since the start of this talk, another 2,000 babies will have come into the world.

Each tiny being is made in the image of God, in each one we see the face of the Christ Child himself.

As we look on the faces of humanity all around us, we see reflected the timeless promise of Christmas – in the child called Emmanuel - the presence of God with us, since the dawn of time; in Palestine 2000 years ago; on this holy morning, and for all eternity.

Amen