

Midnight Mass 2017 – John

There was a moment at the Cuckfield Nativity the other night when I seriously wondered if I would be here intact for the celebration of Christmas. I was holding the largest donkey I have ever seen and the stage on which we stood was creaking ominously! Fortunately, we managed to reach the end without disaster, and it was a delight to see so many of our village parents and children present as we journeyed with Mary and Joseph around the churchyard, to the White Harte before finding the Holy Family in The Old School. So, a question: are you surprised by our Gospel reading on this holy night? You have heard nothing of the vivid reflections of Matthew or Luke on the birth of Jesus, with their wondrous ability to capture our imagination and lead us on a journey via stars, angels, wise men, shepherds, wicked kings and all those other things we associate with the Christmas story.

Instead, John the Gospel writer, gives us one of the most extraordinary passages in the Bible – the Prologue to his account of the life of Jesus Christ - where we find no mention of a stable, a manger or even the **name** of the child whose birth we mark tonight. Instead, we have John's reflection of 'the Word,' an intense theological exploration which sets the scene for the whole of his book.

Although I have reflected on this passage in the December magazine, I hope that you won't mind me leading you to consider further what we might learn from the Prologue.

John opens with the powerful words: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

This extraordinary statement not only echoes the opening words of the Bible but talks of the Word – or Logos- of God – pre-existent before creation and beyond our understanding. In seeking to understand what he talks of when he speaks of 'the Word,' it is important to say that although we might immediately think that John is talking of Jesus, this is not the case – at least, not at this point.

It is, I think, helpful to consider the **Word** he talks of as the **Wisdom** of God - an eternal aspect of God's being – shot through the whole of creation, and beyond our understanding. And yet, wonderfully, John describes the Word as being the true light that lightens every human being – so, lightening people of good will throughout the ages in every time and place, philosophers of every age, artists, scientists, doctors, musicians, ordinary women, men and children – all who reach out with goodness – all exercising their own creativity to enrich other people's lives and all revealing the beauty of God in their own ways. What a gift to humanity! Through this, we are drawn into the life of God in an extraordinary way.

As I said, John makes no mention of the birth of Jesus. Rather, he gives us just one sentence: **The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.**

The unity of Love which God desires to share with each one of us is made known in the face of Jesus Christ – rooted in our humanity. It is through his life, his passion, death and resurrection, we are shown how God longs for us to continually seek to be drawn into lives of self-giving love, and we see the way to this in Jesus, because his journey is expressed within our humanity. It is from Jesus that we learn how to allow the Wisdom of God to work within our own lives.

Because of this, Jesus is the embodiment and revelation of all that we can understand of God within a human life. He shows us what a life lived in the fulness of God can be like. John says even more: in the life of Jesus **'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son – full of grace and truth.'**

We see the fulness of glory in a birth in that stable in Bethlehem, in the life of one who served others and washed their feet; one who sought out those considered 'lost' to lead them on a journey to find their true selves; one who challenged corruption and injustice. It is in such actions that we too find fulfilment of who we are called to be – lives in which we find our true selves through serving others.

Ultimately, Jesus experienced death itself - death on a cross – something that reminds us that we should never forget that Jesus the baby grew into the man who thirty-three years later gave everything for each one of us, showing us that even in this God was prepared to share in the world's darkness. This was and remains Christ's **glory** because in its totality it was an act of self-giving love, and in this **we** are led to the knowledge of lives of Resurrection here and now through him.

We are living in what seems a topsy-turvy world where things of no real consequence consume the innocent, and where humanity allows itself to end up in the dead-end of self-absorption or following heartless or perverted ideologies. It was probably ever thus, and yet in a time when so many, young and old alike, suffer with problems of self-image, addictions, family upheavals and breakdowns, mental health issues, the **Wisdom** of God – the Divine Love - is present with each of us at every moment of our existence: present with us in the sorrows, the catastrophes, present in the everyday, as well as the joys of our lives – longing to lead us further into Divine Love - In every situation God offers each one of us the balm of love – a love made known in the face of Jesus Christ.

My friends, rejoice that Jesus was born for you and me – because in him is found the fulfilment of our hopes and desires. If you have not yet found him, open your heart and allow him to journey with you. You will never regret it.

A very happy and blessed Christmas.

1 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,^[a] 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.^[b]

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,^[c] 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,^[d] full of grace and truth.