

Reflections for Christmas 2020

A real Christmas

Many years ago I bought a newspaper on Christmas Eve, which included a letter from a priest, who was working in one of the poorest and most troubled parts of the world, and his letter included these words, that I copied and kept:

We're having a real Christmas, with soldiers killing children,
families homeless, and the poor hungry and oppressed.

'a real Christmas'? – well, yes, because where Jesus was born there would have been poor people who were hungry and oppressed, and homeless families, as there always are. And before long soldiers were indeed killing children, with the shocking slaughter of innocent children by King Herod.

I love our nativities and carol services, and all the special events that we are missing so much this year – but there is a danger that they can make the nativity story seem so glossy and smooth and sparkly that it loses touch with our real lives.

The real nativity story happened somewhere very ordinary, in an obscure region of a small and fragile country on the margins of the Roman empire - a place unknown to most people at that time. And it happened to real and ordinary people, with a hint of scandal about a young girl who was pregnant before marriage, then people forced to travel away from home, who found themselves with nowhere to stay, and a child born where the animals were stabled, and placed in their feeding trough.

So this real nativity happened in a time of change, and uncertainty, and real danger – a time in desperate need of hope and good news. Perhaps a time a bit like now. The gospel of John tells us that 'the word became flesh and dwelt among us'. The good news is that God has come to live in the midst of us, and is with us in the happy times and celebrations, with us in the routine of ordinary life, and with us in the times of hurt and loss, and worry and trouble. That is what we can celebrate, even at this difficult Christmas time, and where we can find hope for whatever lies ahead.

Revd John Waller

God our Father, the Saviour is born
and those who live in darkness are seeing a great light.
Help us, who greet the birth of Christ with joy,
to live in the light of your Son
and to share the good news of your love.
We ask this through Jesus Christ,
the light who has come into the world. Amen.

Bible readings: Isaiah 9. 2-7; Titus 2. 11-14; Luke 2. 1-14

Story: 'The First Christmas'