

‘The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.’ Words from the prophecy of Isaiah and was the first reading in our liturgy last night and at our Carol Services. When read at Christmas time the words suggest that until the coming of Christ, the world had been living in spiritual darkness. It had been ‘night time.’ We do not know what day or time that Jesus was born but we are given the story that it was during the night so that the glory of the Lord could be described as shining around the shepherds watching their flocks. And the Gospel of Christmas morning, the principal Gospel of Christmas, declares that Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

As we reflect on this wonderful feast, our fears should evaporate, and our hearts and lips sing praise. Wherever we are in the world, and whether our celebration happens to fall in the middle of winter or summer, we can all say that Christmas Day is the warmest day of the year, a day when our hearts are in the right place. It is important to us that the family and those close to us have a happy Christmas, whether they are with us or far away. We are more aware of the needs and hopes of those we love. And hopefully, we are more generous and self-giving. The nature of this feast is so great, yet it has its roots in the most homely and humble of human experiences.

A child is born to us, a son given to us. The Prince of Peace has chosen to live among us as one of us. Into our hands Mary has given her child, heir to the world’s tears and toils and scars. We welcome the holy child to our quarrelsome, battered human family. In our mean and sometimes lonely world, we greet the best friend we will ever have. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, yet he chose to greet us in the most vulnerable form, as a baby, a child.

In this child God became what we all are, in a way that only God could or would. He became himself a child of God. He entered human life completely. ‘The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.’ He became one of us in order to give us the chance to become like him on Earth, to reflect his ways and values, and then to be with him in eternity. This is the central truth of our Christian faith, what we call the mystery of the Incarnation. The God of heaven is immersed in our physical, practical world. Jesus is what God looks like in human form. He comes in the humblest of circumstances. The most ordinary

of mortals were the first to see his face. And the big message in all this is that it is good to be alive, to be human, on planet earth. God loves the world, and the ordinary and every day and blesses it so much by embracing it in person. God's coming to us in this way also means that what is ordinary and human and physical has been raised up, glorified. Above all, the coming of Christ establishes and deepens our dignity. It enables us to change our lives and move onward, and upward, to a new level of humanity.

Today we welcome again the Word made flesh into our world, into our families, into the small but important things with which our Christmases are filled. We celebrate that the glory of God has come to us uniquely in a child. Let us all be proud to adore him on this blessed day. May our love for him and all that he is about continue and increase throughout the new year and always.