

Sermon Sunday 12th December 2021

'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'



Well, how many times in the past couple of weeks have you heard or sang bits of the song 'it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas'? Or getting irritated with TV adverts competing for the best advert.....

And so as we move forward in advent – we move from the forecasts of the ancient prophets to the beginning of their fulfilment with the visitation of the angel Gabriel.

But before we go there, let's remember 'tis the season to be joyful, and so maybe have a giggle or two about what children say about Christmas.

One grandfather was taken aback, when his grandson produced a very long list of what he wanted for Christmas, but when he commented that the list was rather long, he was even more taken aback when his grandson replied – that's just in case this is the last year I believe in Santa Clause.

And it maybe wasn't helped by one Santa, who when he was asking one wee person's name got the retort, 'Tell me yours first' – forgot himself and answered 'Bill'.

On a more religious note, two little girls were looking at a picture of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus. 'That's Jesus mother' said the older one, trying to educate her wee sister and 'that's the baby Jesus in her arms'. 'Where's the dad?' asked the wee one. 'Don't be silly', came the reply, 'He's the one taking the picture'.

And how many of you get hooked on the Christmas jokes from the Christmas crackers?

What do you get if you cross a spook with a polo? A mint spy of course!

What do you get when you cross a snowman with a vampire? Frostbite!

*Ah, but which Christmas Carol is reckoned to be most parent's favourite? Silent
Night of course!*

Silent night!, well at least tranquil scenes and favourite carols depict it in such a way, and I don't want to be a killjoy and the one who spoils the tranquillity of the moment. But what a contrast with the night that Gabriel paid a visit to Nazareth. A night of disturbed sleep, of troubling visions, of distressing news.



For far from being what she wanted to hear, at least not at first, and certainly for a few minutes at least, it must have been one heck of a shock for a young unmarried lass who had kept herself pure, to hear the news she was pregnant.

Mary was deeply troubles by the angel's message, and wondered what his words meant, says Luke.

And yet we can all too readily run past it to the joy she came to know after she came to understand.

Perhaps because we think we understand, we feel the urge to press on, but I want us to have a few moments to think about how anxious she must have been.

Most biblical scholars, based their understanding of the culture of the time, reckon that Mary was probably no more than 14 or 15 years of age when she conceived, and not much older when she gave birth to her first-born son.

And here she was, promised in marriage to Joseph, with all her hopes and dreams dashed by a moment by the devastating news for surely, he would never marry her now.



We of course know from Matthew that Joseph too was having a disturbed night, possible the same night, and that things were going to work out all right. But at that moment, that hardly seemed the case as fear and anxiety came over her.

‘Do not be afraid,’ Mary – the same words Gabriel said to Joseph – ‘Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife’ – for to both of them was given the news that it was God’s will and God’s power and God’s action that would bring this about, and that far from being fearful news, it was awesome news. That at last, after generations of waiting, the moment had finally come.

What the prophets had foretold, and the people had long waited for, had at last come about. The child to be born would be called not just Jesus, meaning Saviour, but Son of God. 'For the waiting was over, the long promised king of king David's line was soon to be born, and Mary herself was the chosen vessel of God's good grace.

And so with assurance, both Mary and Joseph, accepted the good news, and brought into the world and cared for and raised the one who was to come.

In ancient times, Isaiah had predicted the coming of a happy day of great rejoicing, a day of thanksgiving and praise. And he urged the people to sing to proclaim to the nations what God had done, to tell how great He is, because Israel's holy God is great, and He lives among His people.



We are in a different age from them. Political correctness perhaps appears to have gone mad, and many spheres of society run scared of proclaiming that its Christmas, and not some 'Happy Holidays' or 'Season's Greetings': of choosing to ignore, to use a slogan 'That Jesus is the reason for the season'.

If Christmas is about anything at all, it is as Isaiah says, that 'Israel's holy God is great and He lives among His people'.

And what's great is that as Christians we know what it means, and have a duty as God's people to 'Sing to the Lord of the great things He has done', and to 'Let the whole world hear the news'. And yes, all of us has that duty, in whatever small way we can, for Isaiah urged it of everyone.

That song of Isaiah's comes on the back of the message foretelling of the new branch that would arise from the stump of the royal line of David. And so it's right that we celebrate this wonderful event with song and with story, and in the combination of the two, find assurance in and confidence about the truth that we proclaim, and fear no-one proclaiming what we do believe: that in Christ, God took on flesh and lived.

'Who would think that was needed to transform and save the earth might not be a plan or army, proud in purpose, proved in worth?

Who would think, despite derision, that a child should lead the way?

God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas day?

These words of the of the hymn writer John Bell, perhaps sum up the unexpected joy that came to Mary, came to Joseph, and through them came to the world.

And whatever their respective merits, no other religion is the custodian of such wonderful news, not even the Jews whose forefather heard it but rejected it, and so have themselves never come to know or to sing the joy of the Lord.



So let's make Christmas, as it approaches, something that is joy to the Lord as well as having joy in the Lord. Let us, at every opportunity be faithful in proclaiming to others what Gabriel proclaimed to Mary, 'Peace be with you ! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you. In Jesus Christ His Son.'

Amen