

Morning Praise @ Home 31 December 2023

Opening prayer

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Confession Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen *cf Psalm 51*

Absolution May the Father of all mercies cleanse *us* from *our* sins, and restore *us* in his image to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Bible Reading

Luke 2: 15 – 21

Reflection from John

Michael Palin, Joanna Lumley and Simon Reeve are all brilliant travellers who open up the world to us through TV travelogues and vast journeys across the world. Each one shows us how much can be discovered through journeys – long and short – home and away.

Today, I want to talk about journeys.

The Bible has many accounts of how physical journeys played their part on forming God's people down the centuries. From the Exodus and the missionary journeys of St Paul, journeys were not just about getting to a destination but about a way of growing through the experience of meeting different people and seeing God at work, sometimes in the most challenging situations.

Today, I want to look at the journeys which were linked to the Nativity. As we delve into these journeys, I hope we will recognise the potential for encountering God in the midst of life shaping experience.

I. The Journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem:

Our first journey takes us to the humble town of Bethlehem, where Mary and Joseph travelled from Nazareth. Their journey was filled with challenges and uncertainties, yet they remained obedient to God's calling. Through their journey, we learn the importance of faith, trust and obedience to God, even when circumstances seem difficult.

Let's be honest this journey was in part about being messed about by a power-mad leader who simply wanted to know how many people were under his control. Mary and Joseph's journey teaches us that God can use unexpected circumstances and inconveniences to fulfil His divine purposes. Despite the challenges they faced, their journey led to the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, in Bethlehem.

We too can discover God at work even when we face unexpected challenges or detours in life. He is engaged in our lives and speaks to us in trying circumstances and unexpected opportunities even when we don't fully understand what's going on.

2. The Journey of the Wise Men:

Our next journey takes us to the journey of the wise men or Magi from the east who were drawn by signs in the cosmos to an enigmatic new-born ruler. They were people hungry for meaning and enlightenment. They were searching for truth but unsure of what it looks like.

I am often told that people we all know are not interested in God or Church or faith anymore. To be truthful that is not always so in my experience. I often meet folk who are hungry for spiritual experience. They simply don't know where to look and don't find the expressions of Church that we offer to be nourishing and filled with the reality of God. Can we make more room in the coming year and create different opportunities to help people discover the Love of God in Jesus Christ for themselves? Can we ensure that whatever we do does not get in their way?

The journey of the wise men also speaks to me about my own relationship with God.

Through their journey, we learn the importance of seeking Christ with all our hearts and regularly offering Him our worship and adoration in every part of life. They offered their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, symbolizing their recognition of Jesus' kingship, divinity and sacrificial death.

In turn our worship should take us on a journey which involves the giving of ourselves, our resources, and our talents to honour and serve the Lord Jesus. Let us offer Him our best, just as the wise men did. What then will that look like for us as a Church and as individuals?

3. The Journey of the Shepherds:

Our final journey takes us to the shepherds who received the angelic announcement of Jesus' birth. They journeyed from the fields to the manger, witnessing the glory of God in the humblest of settings. Through their journey, we learn the power of God's presence and the transformative impact it can have on our lives.

The shepherds' journey reminds us that God chooses the lowly and the humble to reveal His glory. They were the first apart from Joseph and Mary to receive the good news of Jesus' birth, and their lives were so enriched by encountering the newborn Saviour.

For us the shepherds tell us that we can meet with God in the most ordinary of places.

He is at work in homes, in places of work, in the secular as well as the sacred.

Just as a long walk in the country requires of us to become observant so that we can see the wonder all around us, equally we need to have our eyes opened to God's grace at work in everyday life.

The people we meet each day may be pleasant or difficult, but they may also be the means of God speaking to us - and who knows - like the shepherds, we may return home with new opportunities to share the good news of God's love in the simple routines of life.

Journeys can be everyday, exceptional or exotic and they can teach us profound truth about life, about God and about ourselves.

Let's discover with Joseph and Mary, Wise men and shepherds more of what God has for us on the way. Be prepared to be very surprised. **Amen**

Affirmation of faith

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Prayers of intercession

Let us start our prayers with thanks for the season of Christmas, when the rush of the world stops, and a sense of peace covers the whole earth. We remember those in emergency services and other occupations who had to work over Christmas. Thank you that Jesus came into our world to know the realities we face, and to share them with us.

After Christmas comes the New Year. As we look back over 2023, we pray especially for the Middle East, and the dreadful events that have unfolded since 7th October; for the death and suffering on both sides which have affected so many children and other innocent people. The war in the Ukraine has been overshadowed by these events, but death and suffering are still taking place there, and in other places across our world. May 2024 bring a resolution to some of these conflicts and hope to the nations involved for a better future.

Wars have contributed to a growing refugee crisis affecting every part of the world. We pray for those fleeing danger and persecution, and also for Governments and leaders who have to decide how to deal with increased numbers on already constrained budgets. In a year that will see a General election in Britain and a Presidential election in America, we pray that leaders of courage and integrity will emerge who will work for the common good.

We ask for your blessing on all clergy in the Diocese of Chester. We ask you to strengthen and guide them as they lead their congregations. We pray for our Parishes of St Nicholas and St. Michael.

We know that there are many people who are struggling due to illness, financial problems, loneliness or the loss of loved ones. In a moment of silence, please pray for one person you know who is in particular need of God's help today.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Closing prayer

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**