

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.”

Heb. 1: 1 - 2

God speaks to us, communicates His very life to us, through His Son; God’s final word to us.

A Son born into this world, like any other.

A Son entrusted to His parents, like any other.

A Son, who laughed, cried, smiled, and needed changing and winding, like any other.

Jesus came into the world, like each of us, depending on others for His survival.

Feeling hunger, thirst, cold - like each of us.

Vulnerable to infection, accident and death - like each of us.

But, above all, experiencing love from His parents Mary and Joseph; their love enfolding Him like a protecting veil.

I think, beyond the relentless quest to buy presents, food, and drink, everyone is searching for something true, beautiful, and everlasting.

But don't we all get caught up in the rat-race, which is the secular Christmas?

We exchange the beautiful gift of the Christ-child for roast turkey,

a bottle of wine, a box of chocolates, and the television.

Don't get me wrong; there's absolutely nothing wrong with having a good time, and giving presents at Christmas.

But if all it amounts to is a hangover and an empty heart on the day after Christmas Day, then where's the good news in that?

“Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. You will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” Lk. 2: 10 - 12

The baby who turns upside down the notion of God as all-powerful, in need of nobody else, and totally self-sufficient.

The God, who could destroy us, and start all over again, but doesn't.

The God who loves us so much that He: “He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” Jn. 3: 16

It's a great Christmas tradition, even today - especially in the Chapel of King's College, Cambridge - to have a Service of Nine Lessons and Carols.

The 'Lessons,' of course, are readings from the Bible - the Scriptures - about the coming Saviour.

Pope Benedict, at the beginning of this Advent, urged us to prepare for the birth of Christ by listening to the voice of God, which he said: “Resounds in the desert of the world through the sacred Scriptures.” Pope Benedict XVI: Angelus Address 5 December 2010

And, if we do that, then the Lord will speak to us through His Word, and recreate us into the people He intended us to be from all eternity.

When, as the Psalm says: “You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.” Psalms 139: 13

And, just as He promises in that book, The Bible: “I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.” Ezekiel 36: 26

If we dare to open the pages of Scripture with a tender, and responsive heart, then the Christmas story will take flesh for us instead of being just a plaster tableau in a crib.

Of course, for many people, the Christmas story, represented in this crib, is just a story for children that we grow out of.

Many of us still look at the crib with the eyes of a child when we're adults, and so rob Christmas of its truth.

Though, if we take time to reflect on the crib properly, we'll come to see that the birth of Jesus isn't a religious fairy story, but earthed in the real world in which we live. And to do that let's place ourselves with the shepherds watching their flocks by night on the hills outside Bethlehem.

In their visit, the future suffering of the Christ is foreshadowed because they're the herdsmen of the sheep and lambs that were sacrificed in the Jerusalem Temple day after day in a vain attempt to wash away people's sin by the shedding of their blood.

Here, in the manger is Jesus, the One and Only Lamb of God: "Who takes away the sin of the world!" Jn. 1: 29

A prophetic reminder that at the end of His life on earth, when He's lifted up from the earth on the Cross, His life will be as He was at its beginning: vulnerable, and in the hands of humanity.

At that moment in time, finding the Christ-child in the manger: "Only in their hearts will the shepherds be able to see that this baby fulfils the promise of the prophet Isaiah: 'For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; [and] authority rests upon his shoulders.'" Is 9:6

Exactly the same sign has been given to us. We too are invited by the angel of God, through the message of the Gospel, to set out in our hearts to see the child lying in the manger.

God's sign is simplicity. God's sign is the baby. God's sign is that He makes Himself small for us. This is how He reigns.

He doesn't come with power and outward splendour. He comes as a baby; defenceless, and in need of our help. He doesn't want to overwhelm us with his strength. He takes away our fear of his greatness. He asks for our love: so He makes Himself a child.

He wants nothing other from us than our love, through which we spontaneously learn to enter into His feelings, His thoughts, and His will.

[Through which] we learn to live with Him and to practice with Him that humility of renunciation that belongs to the very essence of love.

God made Himself small so that we could understand Him, welcome Him, and love Him." Pope Benedict XVI: Christmas Mass of Midnight 2006 paraphrase

Jesus came, and hid His glory as a helpless baby; and hides His glory again under the appearance of bread and wine in the Eucharist.

Now, with Mary, the Mother of the Lord - and the shepherds - let us treasure up all these things and ponder them in our hearts. See Lk. 2: 19

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Until tonight I could not fit the size of God into my head.

I thought he was a God for prophets and kings, men of words and wisdom.

But tonight I am looking at God made small, small enough for me, small enough to pick up and hold like a lamb.

I could not talk to a God in the clouds; but tonight when I look and smile and talk nonsense to this tiny thing, I know that I am talking to God.

And it is God who smiles back at me and waves his perfect hands in delight.

And tonight in your smallness, God, you seem bigger and more powerful to me than you ever did before.

I can hold you now, hold you in my head and hold you in my arms, and know that you are holding me in yours.

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