

Sunday 25th December 2020

John 1:1-14 (The Word became flesh) Christmas Day

Sermon by Ian Baldwin - Prayers by Margaret Davies

Hello, and Happy Christmas and welcome to our service. My name is Ian and today is Christmas Day and we will be thinking about God's great gift to us in Jesus his son.

Let me pray as we start.

Lord thank you that we can meet as your people on this Christmas Day and to take this time to focus on you away from the business of the day. Help us to enjoy this day even though it is not how we would choose to spend it and to know the love our friends and family even though we cannot be together. Help us to know the God of love this Christmas.

Amen

I will read from the bible before a reflection on the passage.

Reading: John 1:1-14

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth

Talk

This year has been a difficult one for everybody in various ways as our lives have changed. Covid19 has confronted us with the stark reality of our lives and what we value.

We have witnessed the best and worst of people.

There has been panic buying and hoarding and profiteering.

False claims for government support meaning genuine needs were not met.

An increase in online and telephone fraud as well as bogus charities.

An increase in child neglect and domestic abuse and violence.

Plans have been frustrated and hopes dashed with the ever-changing regulations, Education was damaged and courses deferred. Businesses closed and jobs lost.

Separation from our friends and loved ones especially at times of celebrations or sickness and end of life situations. All these have caused many emotions not least stress, loneliness and mental illness.

The world can seem a dark and desperate place.

Yet despite all the gloom and doom there have been wonderful things.

NHS workers braving the virus, people coming out of retirement, other key workers pressing on during lock-down then the clapping for front line workers. Individuals like Joe Wicks keeping people fit, or 100year old Captain Sir Tom Moore becoming a focus for giving eventually raising £32.8 million, or 5 year old Tony Hudgell who lost his legs due to child abuse raising £1.3 million.

This is all truly wonderful, but we have to ask ourselves what will happen when the pandemic passes? Will the good will and community spirit last? When we all get busy with our own lives again will we retreat into our homes?

This year we have been more conscious than usual of how difficult life can be. How life can quickly change. People have become aware of the need for something more than trying to achieve a work and play balance. It has been noted that there are many people searching the web to find answers to their spiritual questions. Surely there must be more to life than this treadmill I am on? Is there something bigger than us?

Well, the good news is, yes, God has an answer.

It was in response to all the things I have just mentioned and much more that God's son came into the world as a baby 2000 years ago in Bethlehem. Things were bad then and they are not so different now.

Jesus was the light of life coming into a world all those years ago. His name Immanuel means God with us, God amongst us in all our sadness and suffering. God in a dirty manger not in a far off palace away from ordinary people but with us , you and me in our everyday challenges and struggles of our lives.

For Christ's kingdom will last and will not fade away. There are no redundancies in the family of God, no one is cast aside. Rather all are welcome, all are included no matter where you are from or what your background. The light of Jesus shines into the darkness of our lives and brings us hope.

At this Christmas time let us remember that God has given us this great gift of Jesus but we have to receive it. It is a gift which keeps on giving. A gift which is never the wrong size or wears out or the batteries die. But not everybody wants God's gift. When Jesus came to us as a baby many people refused him v10 and 11 of our reading says "for the world did not recognise him and his own did not receive him". In fact King Herod tried to kill him and baby Jesus became a refugee. As a man, the authorities tried to kill Jesus and ultimately he died the shameful death of crucifixion like a common criminal.

However, Jesus rose from the dead for it says the darkness could not overcome the light. And best of all it says in v12 "yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"

As the family of God is made of so many different people from all kinds of backgrounds and countries but we have one common link that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we

are all children of God. It is a family built on love. Love of God and love of our neighbours, giving to others and supporting others and receiving support in return.

During this year some have thought for the first time about spiritual things, others perhaps have returned to a long-neglected faith.

So what would it mean to accept this gift of faith in Jesus?

Well to keep the Christmas picture going imagine for a moment a table all laid for special meal – crisp white tablecloth, napkins neatly folded, candles a beautiful centre piece, cutlery carefully placed and polished glasses. It is a source of pride to the host. Now picture the end of the meal where things are all awry - dirty plates and cutlery bits of food and wine and candle wax all on the tablecloth. That could be a picture of our lives. The mess, the accidents and damage we do to ourselves and others. It clutters our emotions and stains our life just like that tablecloth.

The good news is that because of Jesus, the slate can be wiped clean. Our wrong things can be forgiven so that we can, as it were, be a crisp starched white tablecloth again. Listen to what King David wrote to God in Psalm 51v6&7 (Living bible)

“You deserve honesty from the heart; yes, utter sincerity and truthfulness. Oh, give me this wisdom. Sprinkle me with the cleansing blood and I shall be clean again. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.”

And here is the prophet Isaiah speaking Gods words to his wayward people ch1v16-18

“Oh, wash yourselves! Be clean! Let me no longer see you doing all these wicked things; quit your evil ways. Learn to do good, to be fair, and to help the poor, the fatherless, and widows. Come, let’s talk this over, says the Lord; no matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can take it out and make you as clean as freshly fallen snow. Even if you are stained as red as crimson, I can make you white as wool! “

You see Jesus came so that we might have a clean start as children of God and that is the gift that is on offer to everyone.

Now what will you do in 2021? Why not try an on line church service or maybe when we are able to meet in church come and see us.

Or join Alpha online where you can meet other asking the same kind of questions as you. There is no doubt Jesus existed as a man, but we have to decide who he was indeed I would say who he is.

So when all the good will and lock-down comradery ceases I know that Jesus’ love will continue and I know there is plenty of room for me to grow in my faith.

So, ask yourself this. Will 2021 be a return to the old my work, my rest, my play compartmentalised way of life, or will you let the love of Jesus into your life and live in a new way and make next year the year of walking in the light and love of Jesus Christ?

We think about the gift of Jesus at Christmas time, but the gift is available every day. I accepted the gift of Jesus and I hope you will too.

Let me pray.

Our Father in heaven, thank you for the gift of Jesus your son.
Help us to think about who he is and what he has done for us on the cross.
We ask you to help us understand the mystery of his death and resurrection.
That we may become children of God through the love of Jesus.
Amen

Now Margaret will lead our intercessions.

Prayers

Before we pray, let's confess our sins.

Almighty God, we confess with our whole heart, the wrong doing, thinking and speaking, the hurts we have done to others and the good we have left undone. O God, forgive us for we have sinned against you, and raise us to newness of life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We know, Lord God, you sent your Son into the world to save us sinners, so you have brought us your pardon and peace. Thank you.

On this Christmas Day, we praise and worship our holy God for His amazing gift. Almighty God, as Mary said, our souls glorify you and our spirits rejoice in God our Saviour - for you, Mighty One, have done great things for us. Holy is your name and worthy to be praised.

We have heard how your Word, Lord, with whom you created the world, came to us as a tiny baby and the world was not ready to receive him. Our world needs you now more than ever. We pray for many countries suffering wars and tribal conflict. Please melt the hearts full of hatred and greed so that devastation, poverty, starvation, persecution and homelessness can be stemmed and authorities and governments will work for peace, wellbeing and safety everywhere.

We thank you Heavenly Father for all those who have received your gift of Jesus, have become your children and formed your worldwide church. We pray for all Bishops, clergy, mission partners and leaders everywhere and especially that our churches will encourage Jesus to come afresh into Christians everywhere and into our lives and those in our community. May your will be done in who comes to be our new vicar. Bless the merging of our churches with your Holy Spirit. We thank you and pray for all the work being done through the school, the CAP centre, the food bank, Living Well and our online services. Thank you, Lord for the hard work of our leaders and give them a rest after Christmas. Thank you for the generous giving towards the cost of a new boiler.

Lord Jesus, you became flesh and lived in this world. You taught, showed love and compassion and healing. We pray for those we know who need your help now. May people come to hear you and know you this Christmas time. We pray for those we know in need. Bless Nigel and Sarah's son Tim and Yvette's son Zak and Val and Audrey and anyone else we know who is ill. Please, Lord heal them.

Two prayers for our world's present situation with the virus.

Lord, thank you for uniting Christians across the world during this very difficult and troubling year for many. We pray that you will strengthen people who have turned to you in their time of distress. giving them - and us all - a fruitful New Year.

A prayer by the Bishop of Tonbridge:-

*God of life,
We lay before you our aching sadness at the empty chairs at our Christmas table,
and pray for those whose loss is greater and loneliness more acute;*

*for those working hard and risky shifts through the season;
for people whose lives are spoiled by illness, joblessness and debt.*

You have shared our life and know our fears.

*Show us again the love whose power created the endless stars
and light up our darkened lives with the hope of the Christ child.*

For His name's sake we pray all these prayers. Amen.

As we come to the end of our time together let me point you to our web site where you can find out more about our services and about Alpha courses.

A closing prayer

May God the Father keep you in all your days.

May God the Son shield you in all your ways.

May God the Spirit bring you healing and peace.

May God the Holy Trinity drive all darkness from you
and pour upon you blessing and light.

Amen.

Thank you for listening and have a wonderful Christmas time and may God bless you this coming week.