

Christmas Eve Sermon 2021

Titus 2: 11 – 14 Luke 2: 1 – 20

We have heard in the reading from Luke a familiar story of how the shepherds were told of Jesus' birth. For a preacher this time of year is difficult as we try to tell the message of Jesus' birth in a different way to capture our imaginations.

The birth is the beginning, so I have decided to look forward. Jesus' birth is God on earth, foretold by Prophets in the O.T. In my daily readings I have been looking at Malachi. In Chapter 3 Malachi is telling the Jewish leaders who have been ignoring God and following their own path 'SEE I WILL SEND A MESSENGER, WHO WILL PREPARE THE WAY BEFORE ME. THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT YOU DESIRE WILL COME, SAYS THE LORD ALMIGHTY.' Jesus' is the messenger from God and His birth heralds a new chapter and beginning, preparing the world for the time that God will return to earth, when we don't know, but we must follow His teachings as taught by Jesus Christ until He does.

So, like Malachi I want to look forward from the Nativity. In the letter to Titus from Paul he writes in verse 11 'FOR THE GRACE OF GOD THAT BRINGS SALVATION HAS APPEARED TO ALL MEN.' Saint Augustine describes the birth of Jesus 'as the grace of God has dawned on the world.' This to me is a much more dramatic way of describing the event. The interpretation of the Greek tells me this is God on earth, the manifestation of God on earth rather better than just grace. Jesus' ministry was a complete change for mankind and the world.

So, looking forward in Jesus' ministry. Jesus came from God to save you and me, to change our lives completely by turning to God and letting Him into our lives by following the teachings of Jesus and, yes, I repeat by changing our lives for ever. This is often referred to in the Bible as the light of God. Light figured in the shepherds being told of the birth when the angels appeared. We too must let the light of God into our lives. Can I have the first picture please. Holman Hunts Light of the World the original by Hunt is in St. Pauls Cathedral which is magnificent and one you must see. There are so many messages in this painting; the main point for me tonight is

that door beside which Jesus is holding the light. The door has no handle; why, the handle is on the other side and Jesus is waiting for us to open the door and to let Him and the light of God through into our lives. We don't even have to knock, as Joseph did on inn doors in Bethlehem, the door will just open connecting us to God and the light.

Can I have the next picture please. The Crucifixion by Goya, which I believe hangs in a gallery in the U.K. This leads us as to why Jesus was born; to give His life for you and me on the cross to forgive our sins and give us eternal life. This is a stunning painting; to me it is almost as if God is looking down on His Son on the cross. However, the most stunning single feature is how Goya has captured the light. Even in death the light of God and Jesus is shown shining down.

So, from the manger, to Jesus being the light and His death and of course His resurrection and ascension to Heaven all start with the celebration of the birth of Jesus but we must not stop there, we must all journey in our Christian lives until we meet God in Heaven, a journey which starts with the celebration of Jesus' birth.

Let us pray. Heavenly father grant us so perfectly and without doubt to believe in your Son Jesus Christ so that our faith will grow and hold firm in all we do and speak. Amen.