

CHRISTMAS Sermon 2014

St Michael's Cornhill

2 Samuel 7: 1-11,16; Romans 16: 25-38; Luke 1: 26.38

“Are we ready for Christmas ?”

Well, here we are, just x4 days to go until Christmas.... And on the wonderful Sunday when we remember the amazing faith, and courage of Mary when she heard that she would be the mother of Jesus.

We are all, I am sure, in the final stages of preparation for the great celebration of Christmas, and since I will not be with you on Christmas Day itself this year, I thought that I would share with you some reflections about Christmas linked to the reading about Mary that we have just heard.

Christmas can mean so much, to so many different people.... A time for gathering as a family or with friends and to give thanks for the last year and to gather in fellowship and fun!

We all try and do so much towards the Christmas period..... to make it extra special... to ensure that it will be truly memorable for ourselves and others we love and care for. But,... boy... can it become complicated !

I was reading an account recently of a vicar's Christmas day sermon during which he announced to all to “not worry about the turkey in the oven... but to relax for the next 20minutes...” (his sermons are longer than mine usually are !)... The story recounts how many in his congregation were getting very worried and stressed about what actually was in the oven !!!! - have no fear you will not be late for lunch today! Those

watching the time (and not the vicar) in that church were all very caring people, who just wanted the very best for the family Christmas lunch....

And then, perhaps for each of us, we will try and ensure that the quality of the tinsel and the brightest of the lights on the Christmas tree are of the very best we can (or perhaps cannot really) afford. That the presents for our friends and family are the very best that we can manage and that we do send the best Christmas cards to ALL the people – just incase we miss anybody out.. I know how much care and attention has been taken to decorate this and many other churches. And I am sure that many of us have been up into the loft recently recovering the lights, tinsel and other special decorations (many of which have been past down in the family)... All to try and make Christmas “perfect”.

For those who know me a bit will realise that this City Lawyer is a bit of a perfectionist in many ways – after all, they is what I have been paid for over the years and I like things “just so” and to the highest professional standards.

.....And then we come to hear again the wonderful Christmas story..... [Is that a story of orderly perfection ?](#)

It starts with the untimely and inconvenient announcement which we have heard in today’s reading that the young Mary, before she was to be married to Joseph, was to become pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.....at best inconvenient, and at worse in the strict and less open society of the time, a badge of dishonour and a reason to be ostracised...

There were Mary and Joseph, and their respective families, in the early stages of planning a wedding (following the earlier announcement of their “engagement”)... and then this was happened.....what a shock !! And Joseph, whose role is probably undervalued in the story much of the time, had to come to terms with the fact that his fiancée was to bear a child which is not his before they were to be married (so they could not even pretend that it would be his)....

That is a messy and challenging start to any marriage I am sure..... However, the love which Mary and Joseph had for each other AND, even more, for Almighty God was so great and overwhelming then they did not hesitate or worry how “messy” things would be.... And went ahead and listened to those Angels.

.... And then, after a while, things were probably getting more “normalised” for them both after the start of Mary’s pregnancy

developed.... She was clearly not suffering too much in the later stages of her pregnancy.. so that she could travel to meet her aunt Elisabeth – who was also pregnant....and would be the mother of John the Baptist...

BUT then..... they realised that the Roman authorities were conducting their census and required everybody to return to their family neighbourhood or town..... Mary and Joseph were living in Nazareth and needed to get to Bethlehem (where Joseph’s family were from).... What a mess !! The distance is some 110kilometres (80 miles) and the estimate of the time to walk is at least 4 days. However, with a heavily pregnant Mary that seems unlikely... especially when they had to borrow a donkey from a friend to make the journey.

And then.... When they do get to Bethlehem, there is no space for them to stay, since the town’s inns have been fully booked by all the other people needing to come back for the census

AND the Jewish festival of Hanukkah around the same time which remembers the rededication of the second Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in 160BC.. ... As result, the baby Jesus is born (as we all know from the story) in a manger in an area behind the Inn usually occupied by cattle and other animals....

Why, you might be asking, have I spent so much time describing all the difficulties around the Christmas story ?

Well, I would suggest that, unlike what many might think (and the slick adverts for a perfect Christmas and celebration would try and show) the REAL Christmas celebration – the coming of the Messiah as foretold by the prophet Isaiah – is NOT about perfection, but about REDEMPTION... being rescued ...from the mess of sin and confusion in which we all find ourselves. And the amazing thing is that this redemption and rescuing is

offered to ALL of us as a free gift – not because we deserve it, but through the love of Almighty God.

That can be both challenging and liberating.... Challenging, since for many of us may have an idealised picture of the Christmas story But also, I hope, liberating for all of us - who are less than perfect and who have (and will continue) to mess up and make mistakes in our lives...

Jesus does not seek perfection in our lives but our entire imperfect lives. None of us can be perfect, and the results of all that imperfection can be seen often in the sadness and violence that we see in distant parts of our world, and nearer to home.....

However, as the Angel said to Mary “For nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37)... so Mary answered the call from God

with the powerful words (which are the guide to our own relationship with God). "...here I am the servant of the Lord.. let it be according to your word.." (v 38)

So, over the Christmas period this year, if the mince pies have gone soggy, everyone has the flu, the boiler can't be repaired until January 27th and that cousin "X" who arrived to stay yesterday is going to upset everyone again..... don't worry... that will NOT affect the real message of Christmas.

Jesus did not come to bring condemnation but Good News, salvation and peace to the whole world and redemption for our entire imperfect lives – whoever we are and whatever has happened. That happened 2014 years ago this Christmas, and it goes on happening NOW.

I hope that you all have a very wonderful Christmas this year....and enjoy the liberating joy of the true meaning of Christmas and let us be ready to say, with Mary, "... here I am Lord"... and be ready to see where God may lead us this Christmas and for the rest of our lives.

AMEN