

Like the story of Rebecca we heard this morning there are many versions of the Christmas story. Most have familiar characters like Mary and Joseph, Shepherds and Inn keepers. And others have characters less familiar or even made up like small angels or donkeys, children or mice – and even in one I have the story of the nativity is told by a mouse.

The story is told over and over, because it is a story not just about the characters that we know and are familiar. But because it is a story which is also about us and the way we make room for Christmas in our own hearts and lives. And not just for today either. In the end, the story of Christmas is the story of love – God’s love for us and all of creation. It is a story we are invited to be part of.

And for those who may feel that we shouldn’t play with the Gospel accounts of the Christmas story may need to look at the biblical accounts again. For it is only in Luke’s Gospel we meet all the characters who are most familiar to us in the Nativity play – and even some of them are taken from the Gospel of Matthew. In the Gospel account we

hear of Jesus coming on Christmas Day his birth isn't even mentioned. Rather in John's Gospel – which is beautiful and poetic – we get a different version of the creation story rather than a birth narrative. Today we hear that the word of God has been made flesh and dwelt amongst us!

While John's Gospel may not be the easiest for us to grasp as we sit here bleary eyed on Christmas morning it does remind us that the gift of Christmas is that God dwells in our midst, is part of our lives and part of our stories.

The past two years for most of us has been unsettling and uncertain. Even our planning for today this year was uncertain almost right up to Christmas Eve. We have had times cooped up in our rooms, flat or houses; times cut off physically from family and friends and yet the promise of Christmas is that in all of this we were not, and are not, alone.

The word became flesh and dwelt amongst us.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The gift of the Christmas Story as recorded by John is that it is not just in a manger long ago, but here, today, now! Perhaps this is why John gives such scant attention to the details of Jesus' birth. He is, ultimately more interested in our birth, our new birth as children of God. According to John, that is, Christmas is not really Jesus' birthday at all; rather, it is ours. Christmas is, that is, the day we celebrate our birth as children of God, the keeping of all God's promises, and the beginning of the restoration of all creation¹.

For John what is important that we embody the story of God's gift of love, that we recognise it as part of our story.

I love the story of the nativity as told by Rebecca we heard earlier. It reminds us of this – that we are part of the story – then and now. And if we want the story to continue we need to make space within side ourselves to nurture the seed of hope, grace and love which is God.

Sometimes we think we know the story of Christmas so well we forget how extraordinary it is – and also how personal it

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/christmas-day-nativity-of-our-lord/commentary-on-john-11-14-2>

is. It reflects on our lives now as much as then.

At a time in our collective story when we may find it hard to make sense of what is going on in our world and even in our lives; the message of Christmas resonates not only with familiarity but with a reminder that we are not the first people to have lived through uncertain and unsettling times; and nor do we face such times alone.

God sent Jesus to be born amongst us so that humanity could never say that God could not understand what it's like to struggle against the elements, to have to flee to another country, to be betrayed by a friend, to grieve the loss of a loved one, to fear suffering and or death, to experience a seeming absence of God. Rather, our God has truly walked in human footsteps has been part of our collective story. God's Word of Love has truly taken flesh for us all!

We retell the story of Christmas because it marks a new beginning for us. No matter what this past year has dealt us, no matter what last Christmas meant – this Christmas is a promise of a new beginning. God's

promise in Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us – making things new – giving us a space to lament as well as give thanks, to sing and maybe even to hope for the opportunities that are ahead of us. But like all opportunities, they are only any good if we use them.

If we forget that God is offering us hope and new chances. We need to retell the personal story of Christmas as it speaks to us today. What story what we might write which expresses how we encounter the birth of hope today?

‘Stay at home’ recommendations and ‘prioritise what is important to you’ has meant I have watch more Christmas television this year than I would usually have space for in the lead up to Christmas. (Christmas Day being on a Saturday also helps with that too). I have been struck as I have watched different movies and comedies of hope, but how many tell a person story of a Christmas encounter of love. And this is not just in the shows, but in the Adverts.

Despite our reluctance often to embrace that Christmas is a Christian Feast not a Secular Festival; we actually tell the story of the Christmas message remarkably well. John

reminds us that the story of Christmas is about the fact that God came to dwell in our midst, to be part of our collective story – to travel with us, and invite us to truly know God’s love, compassion and grace.

The gift of Christmas is that we have seen an amazing thing. The child of God, come to earth and lying in a humble manger – so that we might never forget that God loves us, and that God is with us. It is certainly a message of joy worthy of angels singing – and of us sharing that goodness and joy with each other today, and every day in the year to come.

However you spend today – whatever our disappointments or fears; whatever our hopes or anxieties. Remember that God’s love invites each of us to know today is special – it is a new day – a story which is ours to write. And we have much to celebrate. **Amen.**