

Christmas morning is such a special time for so many people. It's not just the excitement of presents, or lunch or even seeing people. Somehow Christmas morning even smells different. When I was a child, Christmas morning was the only day in the year when our whole family didn't get dressed straight away. We would actually spend time sitting around in our pyjamas and taking things slowly.

Now that I am an adult, sometimes Christmas Day just feels like another busy day, and I am sometimes sad about this. Because however we approach Christmas, whatever today holds for us – it should never be just another day.

Sometimes for adults the attitude of the Inn Keeper in the Story we heard this morning can be our attitude. There are more important things to be doing, more pressing priorities for us – even if it is just catching up on sleep. But the wonder and joy of Christmas, can never be just another day – because it is all too spectacular.

I shared with the congregation last night that one of the dangers of the Christmas story is that it is so familiar we forget how extraordinary it is. And if we doubt that is it extraordinary then maybe we need to reflect upon why we are celebrating this day more than 2000 years after the event happened.

We don't know the actual day of Jesus birth, we are not even sure of the exact location in Bethlehem, but we do know not just from biblical accounts, but from reference material from the same period, that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and that his birth bought a change to the status quo – something his later ministry would also do.

It may feel strange then that on Christmas morning we do not hear from the bible the story of Jesus birth. We hear that on Christmas Eve, and we even heard it last Sunday. But today, a more profound version of the Jesus story is told.

The prologue to John's Gospel records the birth Christ, not as the story of the nativity, but as the fulfilment of what took place at the Creation of the world. John's gospel is all about the community indwelling with each other and with God. It is not about how individuals claim Jesus, but rather how God claims humanity through Christ - how God lives in the greatest intimacy with his followers. All through the gospel the words are plural, not singular. For John, it was vital that we understand that God has come for the whole of creation that we might know the light and hope of God both in this life and the next.

In the birth of Jesus, God has truly entered the human condition, a human condition that is not all clean and lovely, warm and welcoming as some Christmas cards would have us believe. The danger is that we lose sight of the wondrous mystery by sanitizing the whole scene. It is too easy to make the scratchy smelling straw all soft

and fragrant; too easy to forget that animals in stables have odours and child birth is noisy!

Just like our experiences of Christmas Day –it may well be crowded and noisy and even harsh – but God is still with us – even in the noise!

But as a result of this birth we can never say that God could not understand what it's like to struggle against the cold or heat, 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. No, our God has truly walked in human footsteps. God's Word of Love is with us and in us.

John's Gospel is read because we are trying to understand what this wonderful story means. The point is that we tell this story of good news and we tell it over and over again. What is powerful about John's Gospel is it is a new beginning – a new Genesis¹. One of the things then that Christmas does for us, is that 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 give thanks, to sing and maybe even to dance for the opportunities that are ahead of us. But like all opportunities, they are only any good if we use them.

If we ignore that God is offering us hope and new chances. If we hold on to the patterns of the past – then we miss the opportunity which Christmas offers too us. Sometimes our Christmas traditions might hold us in this bind too. Sometimes we might have to create new traditions which allow us to find the gift which God has instore for us this Christmas.

As some of you may know, I am a huge fan of Doctor Who. Sadly, this year, there is going to be no Doctor Who Christmas Special but in a Christmas Special a few years ago, the writers played with a sentence, an idea. 'Every Christmas is Last Christmas'. It came from a question asked by one of the characters who reflected *Do you know why people get together at Christmas? Because every time they do it might be the last time. Every Christmas is last Christmas*². There was much debate amongst fans as to whether this meant that we should "live life to the fullest because every christmas COULD be last christmas" or is it more "every christmas only ever happens once"? I suspect either could be true, and maybe worth considering today.

As much as I love Doctor Who, and the sentiment of that episode and even the motivation to make the most of every day that God gives us. I would want to change the sentence, because the message of John's Gospel, and of the story of the Nativity is that Every Christmas is First Christmas. Every Christmas is a reminder of the

¹ <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/12/christmas-eveday-a-christmas-beginnings/>

² <https://www.planetclaire.tv/quotes/doctorwho/christmas-specials/last-christmas/>

unfathomable love of God. Every Christmas is a reminder that God is with us, and is a chance for new birth, new hope and change.

In the story of *Jesus Christmas Party* it is the sight of the Angels around the stable, singing their joy of the birth of Jesus which changes the heart of the Inn Keeper. It is the sight of the angels singing which means that all the other guests turn their frowns into smiles of joy.

That is the gift of Christmas that we have seen an amazing thing. The child of God, come to earth in humility – 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. Remember that God's love invites each of us to know today is special – it is a new day – a new tradition – a first Christmas. And we have much to celebrate. Amen.