

Christmas Eve

I visited a home recently where there was a very extensive Christmas crib. Jesus Mary and Joseph were in a stable in the corner but there were perhaps as many as thirty other figures filling the space leading up to the stable. There were shepherds with their many sheep and goats and other animals around them. The Magi were making their way towards the place of Jesus's birth. And there were many other figures there of people that looked like you and me. I thought it was a very beautiful image of what we are doing here tonight. We have come to Bethlehem to celebrate the birth of Jesus our Saviour. We have been drawn to the light that he brings into our world.

Our reading tonight from the Prophet Isaiah proclaimed, "The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone. You have made their gladness greater, you have made their joy increase." There may have been times this year when we have felt that we have walked in darkness, in a land of deep shadow. There may have been times when we have been overcome by sadness or grief. Tonight, we come to the one who brings us light. Tonight, we come to the one who restores our joy.

We listened again to the account of the birth of Our Saviour as Luke tells the story. Mary and Joseph made

their weeklong journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem not because they wanted to go there. They made that tiresome journey because the government told them that they had to. There have been many times this year when we have done things that we did not want to do. But out of concern for our own health and the health of others we have kept our distance from one another, worn our masks and been vaccinated. For any of us who have found those things particularly difficult perhaps we need to speak to Mary and Joseph about that.

Jesus was born in the space of the house where only the animals lived because there was no room in the inn. He was wrapped in bands of cloth and placed in a feed trough. How many people in our world today cannot find room at the inn? How many refugees are forced to take desperate measures to try to find places where they feel safe and can begin a new life? How many in our own communities cannot find suitable housing for themselves and their families? I'm sure that Jesus who was homeless has a deep empathy with every one of them.

The message of Jesus' birth was given first not to those who were well off and living comfortably, but to those who were on the edge of society, the shepherds who looked after the sheep of others during the cold winter's nights. They were the ones to whom the angels brought the news that a Saviour had been born for them. No one

of us enjoys being without the things that we think we need. We soon tire of always trying to meet the needs of others rather than our own. And yet in some strange way we discover that in meeting the needs of others we do satisfy many of our own needs. We discover that the need to be loved and to love cannot be separated. We discover as St. Francis tells us, that it is in giving that we receive.

Tonight, we listen again to what the angel told the shepherds. “Do not be afraid. I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people.” Most of us need to be assured often by God’s message of not being afraid. There are so many things that we fear. There are so many things that cause us anxiety. And yet our God wants us to know that he has come into our world to take away our fears and to give us his peace. When we know the joy of God’s constant presence with us then we can face the pains and challenges that come our way with a heart that is open to the one who will carry us through those difficult times.

The angel told the shepherds that the truth of what they had been told would be in the sign of a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And so the shepherds went off to see that child. That is why we are here tonight. We have come to see the child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. We have come

to invite him into our hearts again. We have come to make a place in our homes for the homeless one. We have come to draw light from the Light of our world. We have come to renew our love for the one who came into our world to show us how much he loves us.