

Christmas Eve

You and I will each hear the story of the birth of Jesus in a different way. We will listen to that story with our minds and our hearts open to different things about what happened that speak into what is happening in our lives now and where our relationship is with Jesus.

This week I have experienced what so many of you have experienced sometime over these last three years. I contracted the Covid virus. I then tried to reflect upon the story of Jesus' birth in the light of that experience.

Did Mary feel unwell as she made the long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem? She was heavily pregnant with Jesus, and it must have at least made her very uncomfortable to make such a journey. How difficult was it for Joseph and Mary to fill out the government registration forms when they got to Bethlehem? You and I didn't have to travel anywhere and could just use our phones to register that we were positive for Covid.

Can we imagine how anxious they were when there was no room for them at the inn? Perhaps we can feel something of that anxiety when we are waiting for a medical appointment. The only place they could find was the room where the animals were housed. In many ways we could say that they were put into isolation, far away from the bustling crowds that filled Bethlehem.

But I am sure that there was something of God's plan in that. The birth of Jesus was something so mysterious that it had to be in a quiet place away from the crowds. If it not for the angels telling the shepherds that this had happened, then nobody would have known. But it was a secret that could not be kept. The heavenly choirs did their best to shout out the good news that Jesus was born and that a Saviour had come into our world.

That good news was given first to the shepherds out in the bitter cold night keeping guard over other people's sheep. It was to those who had nothing that God chose to gift with the news of his son's birth. We are here tonight because we long to hear that news again. Whatever is happening in our lives at this moment we need to know that Jesus has been born for us. We want to invite him into our lives again so that we can experience that peace and joy that the angels sang about.

We look closely at Jesus lying in the manger and perhaps we see for the first time how helpless he is, how dependant upon others he is, how much like you and me he has become. And from the manger he reflects back to us how dependant we are upon one another; how helpless we are without the love and the support of those around us; and how much we need to be in relationships that are life giving, with one another and with Jesus himself.

Christmas is a time when we renew those relationships within our families and our friends. But most of all it is the time when we renew our relationship with Jesus. He lies in the crib with his arms extended, welcoming us into a relationship of love. And that relationship of love is not just for us, but it is through us, and so often only through us, he reaches out to all who need him.