

**Sermon for 25<sup>th</sup> December 2022, Year A, Christmas Day  
Preached at St Michael Smarden and All Saints Biddenden  
Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-4(5-12); John 1:1-14**

**Sermon**

I once saw a post on Facebook that read, “Each of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is room for Jesus”. It’s a clever quote that reminds us that Christmas is not just a heart-warming story from long ago, but something that continually invites a response. Do we make room for Jesus in our busy, busy lives?

But actually, I think most of us are not innkeepers. We’re not the ones who have got life all sorted out where all we need to do is share a little bit with others. And even if we were, we’d still be missing out on the main event. For sure, the innkeeper says, ‘you’re welcome to use the stable,’ but then I bet he goes back indoors to his comfort and misses everything that happens next.

This stable is strictly a place for the outsiders, the ones who don’t fit in. Here is a non-traditional family, Mary and Joseph, outsiders because of broken social taboos – a pregnancy outside of marriage. They’re rejected and kept at arm’s length. They find a temporary home among other social outcasts such as shepherds whose work made them unclean, animals that were by nature unclean, in a stable that was definitely not clean, feted by foreigners in the form of magi or wise men, who were adherents to an entirely different religion.

The story of Jesus’ birth is one of outcasts making a welcome for other outcasts. Herod the king is not at the birth. The chief priests and pharisees, the religious leaders, are not at the birth. The Roman overlords are not at the birth. Even the innkeeper is not actually at the birth. Essentially, Jesus is born to a mismatched couple staying in a night shelter next to a soup kitchen, surrounded by rough sleepers, seasonal workers and visited by migrants.

Anyone who doesn't quite fit into society, anyone who's rejected by the mainstream, who gets abused in the street and told to move on, anyone mocked because they're honest and open and vulnerable or just a little bit different; this is who God chooses to be born among. So today I don't think we're innkeepers. Today, this church, grand as it may appear, is really an old cattle shed, the altar is a manger, and we are the humble shepherds and wandering magi, not really sure why we're here, looking for belonging perhaps, or a sign that things will be okay. We're not the ones with all the power, deciding whether to condescend to make room for Jesus. We're just happy to see God smile.

But, you know, this idea that God has been incarnated, made human, it's always been controversial. It was three hundred years before the Church really accepted it. To the Jews it was blasphemy: their evidence for Jesus' execution was that he claimed to be the Son of God. And even many of the first Christians would have seen Jesus as entirely human, not divine at all, or at least not as divine as God the Father – maybe more like an angel.

On the other hand, by the time of John's gospel, there was clearly a strand of the Christian faith that believed not only in Jesus' divinity, but that he had always been equal and one with God the Father, from the very beginning before any creation. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him. And the Word became flesh and lived among us." It's very explicit.

And so, we have this other strand of the Christmas story. Jesus is not only fully human, but fully divine. The God who had created all things, whose glory filled the heavens and the earth, the God who until now had communicated only through prophets, commandments, dreams, visions and inspired writing, too overwhelming to be experienced with anything other than utter fear and awe; this God was humble enough to become human and be born among the outcasts,

and spend his life among us, never taking advantage of his power for his own sake, but being entirely himself, full of love for others.

The Incarnation removes any hint of separation between God and Creation. There is no longer a hidden God 'out there', but God reveals Himself as entirely entwined with creation. By becoming human, God makes humanity sacred, or perhaps better, he *reveals* humanity to be sacred, and sacred not just in our highest aspirations and holiest ideals, but in the messiness of a manger and stable and giving birth surrounded by so-called unclean shepherds and animals.

This isn't something that can be expressed in words, not easily at any rate. It's hard enough for most people to believe in God, let alone a God who becomes a man. The intellectual mind can't figure it out, which is why poetry comes to the fore, and astounding choral anthems are composed, and great cathedrals are raised up, and communities are formed, and people give up their entire lives to focus on paying attention to God and the Jesus event and what it might mean for humanity.

Preachers have no proof regarding this Word made flesh. We know it does something to us, this idea that God did not stand far off but – as the prayer goes – “you met us in your son and brought us home”. Even if Jesus is 'only' a holy teacher and wise healer, I'm still in love with him, but what if I can countenance even for a moment the idea that Jesus is the divinity that created and sustains the world in love, that the same God is here now in the Holy Spirit, not totally other, purely spiritual, distant, impossible to relate to, impossible to communicate with, but totally at home in the messiness of material reality, wounded and abused as we all are, outcast and never really understood?

I don't know how God becomes man, how the Word becomes flesh, but the idea of it rocks my world, makes everything sacred, reveals every breath to be full of God's love. Because of the Incarnation, because of the Creator bursting

forth into creation in Jesus Christ, I can glimpse what God is like, reach out my hands, and love him, and let him love me, utterly. Amen.