

# United Benefice of Old Brampton and Great Barlow

## Fr Stanley Monkhouse Sermon Archive

### Year A – Advent to Lent

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### Advent 2, 9 December 2007 - HC Wirksworth

**Isaiah 11:1-10.** A shoot from the stump of Jesse

**Romans 15:4-13.** The root of Jesse to rule Gentiles

**Matthew 3:1-12,** JB, camel's hair clothing, locusts wild honey, You brood of vipers! Hard words.

Sermons should have three parts, we are told, so mine has two.

Two views of the religious role model on the media recently

- Emily off Emmerdale. Is that what priesthood is?
- Iranian comedian: for ever turning the other cheek.

Contrast that with JB: Honey, Locusts, Smelly, Challenging

What would we make of JB if he came in now? of anyone who came in here now? What would they make of us?

What did I make of you when I came, late, two years ago?

We can learn much from those that are different from us

- Only way new things happen, otherwise stagnation
- to push at edges – crucifixion for them, but progress for everyone else
- Galileo, science, mutations
- Other denominations
- People who see and do things differently
- Why do we surround ourselves by those who don't challenge?
- Why don't we listen to those who don't come to church?
- Why don't we listen to the homeless, angry teenagers in WW streets?
- Why do we ignore the things that niggle at us – inconvenient like the Baptist
- Paul's conversion – things niggled at him, and then something overwhelmed him

Advent is for reflection and waiting, so use this time for listening to those who challenge us, and niggles inside.

#### Who are today's prophets?

the ones who make us uncomfortable, the ones who say what others dare not

Whistleblowers

People who provoke our rules, who slip through the net

Struck me how often it's their rough edges that do the work

Image of rose in advent: JC or BVM

Rose in some translations: rose blossoming as Christ. Rose growing from stem. The noble stem of Jesse.

- Roses have thorns. Not only to minimise being eaten, but roses use thorns as anchor points in the hedgerow to permit them to grow skywards.

### **How can we find our thorns, to provoke development and growth (growth in advent)?**

Peter McVerry, a Jesuit priest working with Dublin young homeless

- Honorary Fellowship by the place I used to work
- acceptance speech he said:
  - two reasons why I should not be here.
  - first reason: you shouldn't get an award for doing what you love
    - changed me. challenged views, values, understanding of God.
    - taught me not to judge. to judge them, I would be judging myself.
    - taught me to be angry at the way in which society has ignored them.
  - second reason: shouldn't have to be working with young homeless people because there shouldn't be any. Homelessness in the 3rd wealthiest country is obscenity.
- He is truly a thorn in the side of the Irish establishment.

### **What is he telling us?**

- Question capitalism and its way of forcing a competitive struggle with each other.
- Our security is not to be found in dividing us from one another, but in community, supporting one another, looking out for one another that we find our security. NOT JUST CHURCH.

**Disadvantaged people are prophets** in – people who reveal our values, make us uncomfortable. Like the homeless teenagers on drugs in our streets.

- Should we be patient?
- Where is the Magnificat?
- What will we and the church do about this?
- What are they warning us about?

## **Advent 2**

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts resonate to your praise and glory, Lord, our strength and salvation.

Lovely advent etc

bunnies soft toys

Gold, frankincense and Taylor's port.

But hold on a minute

Jesus' message requires that we practice what he preached. This is difficult stuff

Advent on Channel 4 Provocative. Stimulating, Surprising. Disturbing. Unexpected.

All these words apply to Jesus' teaching.

If you follow me, you carry a cross.

The first will be last, the last first.

Wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

I have cast fire on the world, and see I am guarding it until it blazes.

I bring a sword.

Whoever does not hate his father and mother, sister and brother, cannot become a disciple.

Do not lend money at interest.

Love your enemies and pray for those that abuse you.

So where ever did we ever get the impression that Jesus was meek and mild. Christian children all mist me mild obedient good as he,

Living the Christian life is challenging, pursuing truth is difficult: think of the Mirfield fathers in South Africa, Bonhoeffer in Germany, Sin in the Philippines, Romero in wherever he was, the Methodists in the industrial revolution, the sum priests in the twentieth. thingie in Iraq, thingie in Liverpool

To live according to Christian teaching is to seek truth, not self-deception:

OT message  
Truth can divide  
Truth can hurt before it heals.  
Truth produce hatred  
Truth can leave a person standing alone  
Truth can appear to fail before it succeeds

How do we do this?

Lord left no commands other than three  
The Master left few specific instructions about devotional life. And he said nothing about how many times we should attend church, or break bread together, or what hymns should be sung, or indeed, and this may come as a shock to some, absolutely nothing about how the arrangement of the flowers. He gave us a few instructions about prayer – principally that it should be in private – and left us the Lord's prayer.

I'm not decrying words, liturgies and music – they are very important expressions of human needs when contemplating the ultimate being, and I share Pope Benedict's view that worship should lift us up to heaven, but I am saying that we should bear in mind the needs of the community when we approach these issues.

Our Lord, though left three very specific commands:

- You shall love the Lord God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength.  
You
- shall love your neighbour as yourself.
- Love – the new covenant demands nothing else. Love without self-sufficiency.
- eat and drink in remembrance of me

I put it to you that there is nothing else that matters. You shall love the Lord God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength BY loving your neighbour as yourself.

And I don't just mean the church going community. How do we reach the unchurched. What impression would they get if they came in to one of our services? Would they get a taste of heaven or would they get an impression of an exclusive club with in-jokes, and inaudible mutterings? All utterly trivial from one point of view, but utterly important when the church becomes the teddy bear substitute of childhood familiarities. I suspect we have all experiences both these extremes at some point in our lives, and all stations between.

So we need courage, faith and hope. We need to rest in our Lord's promises.  
The second lesson gives us some guidelines – which are simply another way of saying love God and love your neighbour as yourself.

Spirit of unity – doesn't just come, we have to work at it. We have to search our consciences.

There is no need to panic or to be afraid that we cannot work these problems out, Paul says. God can drastically change the situation. He is that kind of a God. The apostle suggests two things we can do when we get involved in a disagreement like this:

First, there ought to be prayer, prayer for unity. Paul prays himself that God may grant "a spirit of unity among yourselves."

Second, be thankful for what unites us, and minimize the things that divide us.

Remember that if we think that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

We need light that illuminates the issues for us.

We need light that illuminates our own attitudes so that we come to see all the dark corners of our soul

That's what Advent is about: light  
We look from afar and see the light approaching  
We have our lamps ready (scripture tells us that there is no sympathy for us if our lamps are not ready – there is no sympathy for the unready)

When the Lord comes, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians, he will bring to light things that are hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

Light that sheds on dark corners  
We must be ready (Wachet auf)

Give us the grace to listen to each other and try to understand each other.  
Be ready to move out of our trenches  
Keep our eyes open so that we can see light  
We need as the advent collect says the armour of light, and as I say the illuminating beam of light

Let there be light

When the light of Christ shines into my souls and illuminates what is there, I see some unpleasant creatures wriggling about. It may be that you are altogether better people than I, with pure whiteness only within your souls, but looking around I doubt that. So the challenge is to confront my demons inside in the hope that the light shone by the Lantern of Christ will bleach them. Demons  
that are enemies of our good selves

only so fighting are we adult fruitful happy (von Hügel)  
These enemies within are more dangerous than any external enemy because they inhibit my goodness within, often through guilt. I must love these enemies, love my demons, shine Christ's lantern on them and watch them shrivel up.

This lantern allows all the crusts that have built up round us to melt away. crusts like Russian dolls, and when we get to the core, we get down to our self-less selves.

Then we can stop concentrating on ourselves and start concentrating on God. Like Beuno the dog.

So in Advent let us aim the beam of Christ's life into our hearts so that it can bleach our hurts to give us that sense of detachment that allows us to ignore ourselves and work for the coming of God's kingdom.

## **EMMTC Sermon for Advent 3, 2004**

### **Please note: I dispensed with these notes when I came to preach**

Advent is my favourite time of year: cold, sunny sometimes, sense of excitement at things to come, nearly always a cold, exciting hymns and readings, lovely advent music and beautiful, awe-inspiring imagery.

Isaiah is the source of many rich images for Advent. In the OT lesson for today, the third Sunday in advent, Isaiah 35:

- Wasteland rejoice, bringing forth flowers (rose, crocus)
- Eyes of the blind opened, Ears of the deaf unsealed
- Lambs leap like a deer, Tongues of dumb shout for joy
- Desert transformed, Ransomed of YHWH will return with joy and gladness. Sorrow and lament ended

Rose in some translations: rose blossoming as Christ. Rose growing from stem. The noble stem of Jesse (Isaiah 11).

- And these two themes, flowers and Jesse, are combined beautifully in the 15th century German hymn *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*, a spotless rose is growing (Howells, lovely recording, *Faire is the Heaven* – John Rutter)

The remainder of this sermon grew from a reflection on the theme of Christ and the Church as a rose. Roses have thorns. Not only to minimise being eaten, but roses use thorns as anchor points in the hedgerow to permit them to grow skywards.

How can we find our thorns to use to permit us and the church to grow, to provoke? When did the church grow so bland and mealy-mouthed, and horribly nice. The typical Anglican response to a thorny problem seems to be "Let's have another sherry". It wasn't so with the Methodists of the 19th century, or the Anglo-Catholic slum priests of the 20th. When did we lose our fervour?

As some of you know I spent 15 years working at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and from time to time I look at the website to see how old friends are doing. Last Wednesday I was wondering where I could find some inspiring image of being thorny in the service of the Master, when quite by chance on RCSI website I saw that the College had awarded a fellowship to Peter McVerry, a Jesuit priest working with Dublin young homeless. He is truly a thorn in the side of the Irish Government, and what he said in his acceptance speech, published on the website, spoke to me very deeply. Here is some of what he had to say:

two reasons why I should not be here.

- first reason: shouldn't get an award for doing what you love
  - changed me. challenged views, values, understanding of God.
  - taught me not to judge. to judge them, I would be judging myself.
  - taught me to be angry at the way in which society has ignored them.
- second reason: shouldn't have to be working with young homeless people because there shouldn't be any. Homelessness in the 3rd wealthiest country is obscenity.

### **Now**

- Question capitalism and its way of forcing a competitive struggle with each other.
- Our security is not to be found in dividing us from one another, but in community. It is in supporting one another, looking out for one another that we find our security. To know that difficult times should fall on us, that we have a community who cares and who are willing to support us is where security really lie
- Disadvantaged people are prophets in – people who reveal our values, make us uncomfortable.

Curiously, this message very like that in the verses immediately preceding the epistle set for today. In this, James is writing to Jewish churches outside Palestine, and is urging them to be patient, and in the preceding verses he denounces the unjust rich, whose victims cry to heaven for judgment on their exploiters.

What sort of world is the master being invited back to?

- are we ashamed of how we've let it develop? should we be?
- Should we be patient?
- Where is the Magnificat?
- What will we and the church do about this?
- Joke about Christians working with homeless in New York. Methodists pick them out of the gutter, Baptists wash and feed them, Presbyterians educate them, Anglicans introduce them to the right people in society, and then Methodists pick them out of the gutter again.

### **SO THORNS: DON'T BREAK THEM OFF – USE THEM TO PROVOKE ACTION**

I close with ..... George Herbert 1593-1633 which wonderfully express the Advent message and some of the themes in this address:

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life  
Such a Way, as gives us breath  
Such a Truth, as ends all strife  
And such a Life, as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength  
Such a Light, as shows a feast  
Such a Feast, as mends in length  
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart  
Such a Joy, as none can move  
Such a Love, as none can part  
Such a Heart, as joyes in love.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, whose righteousness dawns upon the world scattering the darkness of sin, death and injustice, grant us grace and glory.

c. 850 words here, but this is 'shorthand'  
1000 words approx 10 minutes. On target so far.

## **Advent 3, 16 December 2007**

### **Eucharist Bradbourne**

Isaiah 35: 1-10 Wilderness and dry land shall rejoice etc

James 5: 7-10

Matthew 11: 2-11

Two views of the religious role model on the media recently

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- Iranian comedian: for ever turning the other cheek.

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What would we make of JB if he came in now? of anyone who came in here now? What would they make of us?

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  - Galileo, science, mutations
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  - People who see and do things differently
- 
- Why do we surround ourselves by those who don't challenge?
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  - Paul's conversion – things niggled at him, and then something overwhelmed him

Advent is for reflection and waiting, so use this time for listening to those who challenge us, and niggles inside.

### **Who are today's prophets?**

- the ones who make us uncomfortable, the ones who say what others dare not. Whistleblowers. Fool.
- People who provoke our rules, who slip through the net

Struck me how often it's their rough edges that do the work

Image of rose in advent: JC or BVM

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Peter McVerry, working with Dublin young homeless

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Like the homeless teenagers on drugs in our streets.

- Should we be patient?
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- What will we and the church do about this?
- What are they warning us about?

We don't need to be able to see far ahead: JB didn't.  
he asked from prison ...  
Just do what you have to, and that is its own prophesy.

Make mistakes: they are forgiven

## **Advent 4, 23 December 2007**

### **Eucharist KI**

Isaiah 7:10-16  
Romans 1:1-7  
Matthew 1:18-25

Advent waiting  
What are we waiting for?

Surprising

- Mary
- Joseph
- Shepherds
- Wise men

Waiting for a surprise?

My job: to show people how to live life to the full  
not rules and should nots but enabling us to free ourselves

- Self examination

Perhaps the surprise will be when we see ourselves as we really are, not as we deceive ourselves we are

'Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. ... There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.'

This is the truth  
Thus he in love

## **Christmas 2007**

May our hearts be open to the word of God and may I speak in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit

How many of you have received book tokens for Christmas? I have two books that I would like to recommend to you. The first is a novel "Salmon fishing in the Yemen" by Paul Torday and the second is "Glory in our midst" by Michael Perham, who until 2005 was the Dean of Derby Cathedral and is now Bishop of Gloucester. My address today borrows heavily from both these books.

Salmon fishing in the Yemen is about a ruler a Sheikh, who has a dream to introduce salmon into the mountain streams of the Yemen. In order to achieve this almost impossible dream he employs a highly sceptical scientist. Gradually the scientist is won round. Towards the end of the book the

scientist hears the words of the sheikh "I taught you to take the first step; to learn to believe in belief. And one day you will take the second step and find what it is you believe in".

As its Christmas let's have some good news. Attendances at cathedrals are growing year on year. This year over 7,000 people will attend services during Christmas week at Derby Cathedral. Despite the cynicism of the media it is clear that people with no faith increasingly recognise that, to use a hackneyed phrase, they have a "God-shaped hole" in their lives. There is a desire, I think a basic human desire, to believe in belief. Christmas provides a unique opportunity for all Christians to share the joy of believing in belief with those searching to fill that gap in their lives. Christmas provides us not just with a chance to believe in belief but for those of us blessed to have reached that first stage a moment when we can remind ourselves what it is we believe in .

Whether you have been a parent or not whenever you hold a newborn child in your arms you cannot but be filled with wonder. In your hands is a life with seemingly boundless potential. You believe that suddenly all things are possible. Looking into the crib on that first Christmas morning the wonder was far greater. For there looking back at you lying in that rough hewn trough was God. God comes to us, not in a way that demands our worship but in complete vulnerability, seeking our freely given love.

Michael Perham, in his book *Glory in our Midst*, sees the Inn in the Christmas story as standing for the world of the everyday, with its joys, laughter, friendship and sorrow. It is a place full of mixed emotions and into the middle of it comes Jesus Christ, happy to share with us the messiness of our lives.

Jesus turns the world order upside down. To have followed the practice of the world he would have been born in a palace, befitting his status. The high priests, rulers and nobility would have been the first to know and eventually the news would have filtered down, doubtless in a carefully managed way. But He did not choose that route. Instead the poor were the first to know; those on the margins of society, scraping a living on the exposed slopes of Bethlehem looking after the sheep of the wealthy. The manner of Jesus's birth teaches us that in order to follow Christ we must put concerns about society aside and focus only on Christ. Jesus is the God who pitches his tent in a world of refugees, tyrants, drunken revellers spilling out of the inn of life. And so, for the Church to be true to its calling it too must be a community that welcomes and includes without reservation those that the world classes as misfits and those at the margins of society.

The birth of Jesus Christ offers redemption for us all. Gregory of Nazianus, one of the early church fathers encourages us to "Honour this tiny Bethlehem which restores us to paradise". He calls the birth a miracle not so much creation rather re-creation. That possibility of re-creation is open to all of us. St Paul in 2 Corinthians 5.17 says "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation, everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new. The birth of Christ enables us to be re-born into the love of God.

Perhaps more than any other service, Midnight Mass and Christmas morning Eucharist are so very special because they encapsulate the whole of Christ's redemptive life on earth. We start our service at His birth placing the baby Jesus into the crib and move on through the words of the Eucharist to His passion, the cross and to His glorious resurrection. The road from Bethlehem leads ultimately to Calvary. So we move from the manger to the altar from the crib to the cross. The baby in the manger grows to be a boy and matures into manhood. And the man's body is taken and beaten, reviled, scourged and crucified.

When we were coming to the end of our training the Readers were asked to contribute a piece of writing that was important to them in their journey of faith. The book was given to the readers in the year behind us to encourage them on their journey. One of the poems was Christmas by John Betjemen. I will read the final verse:

No love that in a family dwells  
No carolling in frosty air  
Nor all the Steeple-shaking bells  
Can with this single truth compare  
That God was man in Palestine  
And lives today in Bread and Wine

Later in this service Bob will lift the bread over which he has said the words "This is my body which is given for you" God is not remote. He comes to us in the physical and the material as well as the spiritual. God has come to us on earth in bodily form; as a child lying in a manger, as a man crucified for us on a cross and today He comes to his people in bread and wine and in so doing gives them his body and his blood so that we might live in Him and He in us.

And so just as every Eucharist is a not just a little Calvary it is also a little Bethlehem.

I hope that at some point amid the rush and frantic activity of Christmas you will set aside a quiet moment to make your own journey to Bethlehem to visit that stable and to look with wonder at the babe lying in the manger as Betjemen puts it "The maker of the stars and sea become a child on earth for me?"

And whilst you are there, renew your belief in belief, remember what it is you believe in, give thanks for your Christian faith and promise to share the joy of that belief with others in your daily life.

Happy Christmas  
Amen

## Epiphany

Gifts  
Children  
Herod  
Wise men from the east

Theophany

### Gifts

- not because he needed them but because of who he was
- given in love
  
- we give people gifts because we need them, want them to think well of us
- quite often it's a sign of our neediness
- return empty-handed: they have in fact given us something
- We bring gifts today: ourselves, singing, participation
- our hands are empty, so ready to receive what the baby can give us
- we receive spiritual sustenance: the body and blood
- We are lifted to God, as he comes to us
- Admirabile commercium

### Not like Herod

- His hands were full, and he was threatened by the baby. SO threatened he wanted it killed.
- You can see this symbolically
- child within, new ideas
- Baby is powerless.
- Gandhi did not have anything. He had only his two empty hands and his Hindu belief. But the powerful British Empire, with all its gunboats and armies, was not able to win the fight against his empty hands. They had no chance against a small faithful Hindu.

### Hindu Zoroastrian Wise men

- Followed star
- Refused to cooperate with Herod
- Gandhi again

We are very powerful when we act without any of the trappings of power. This is when the layers that cover us are thinnest, and our lights can shine out most brightly.

'Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. ... There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure

around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.'

Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven

## Epiphany 2

**Isaiah 49:1-7**

**1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

**John 1:29-42**

Baptism

Human recognised as divine

The servanthood of the divine

Isaiah, theme of suffering servant

### suffering?

- Christians who suffer for their faith in spectacular fashion. Christians in Sudan. Christians in countries governed corruptly where they can see that government policy is unjust – Zimbabwe for example.
- In my last job I sometimes found myself in the role of loyal dissenter. This kind of suffering servanthood at work is common to many of us – we see something that is wrong, and we must risk an adverse reaction if we point it out.
- All this is prophecy. We need prophets. We need look no further back than the twentieth century to see what happens when prophets are silenced. Germany. Now WMD, Kelly.
- Jesus was both spiritual and revolutionary – two sides of the same coin, and such people ask real, often painful and upsetting questions to show what the true situation really is. This certainly involves suffering – it is never easy to go against the grain.

### service

- servile about this servanthood. This servant indulges in some fairly robust discussions. The servant is powerful and active. This servanthood is not slavery, but service. Servanthood-diaconos-can be used of one who furnishes, supplies, conveys messages.
- Servants are very influential. Those who serve us in shops are quite often the people we talk to. They hear a lot, and can make soothing noises, they can give gentle advice, and their comments can influence us greatly.
- Jeeves and Wooster? Bertie Wooster might well have been the employer, but there is no doubting who had the influence.
- Servants do not seek power and rank, but they are very influential.

### Pouring out

#### Now let's look at lamb

Sheep in crib

One of the earliest explanations of how to understand Jesus as the Lamb of God comes from Clement, the Bishop of Rome at the end of the first century. "He never opened his mouth, like a lamb led to the slaughter-house, like a sheep dumb before its shearers" (Isaiah 53.7). The connection is a haunting one, and it begins to account for why it is John Baptist who acclaims Jesus as the Lamb of God. The identity of John is established by a quotation from this same part of Isaiah. The prophet speaks of the voice crying in the wilderness (Isaiah 40.2) — a role that the evangelists ascribe to John.

The mosaics in Rome that commemorate early Christian martyrs illustrate the theme of **triumph through suffering**. They graphically suggest a shared identity between Jesus and his disciples, who are all illustrated as sheep. This commonality between teacher and disciples was foretold by Isaiah:

"Ours were the sorrows he was carrying . . . and by his wounds we have been healed" (Isaiah 53.4,5). They depict the 12 apostles as lambs attendant upon Jesus, the chief lamb, haloed and standing on an outcrop of rock from which flow the four rivers of paradise in the new creation.

The first statement that is being made here tells us that Jesus the lamb is **not simply a figure of gentleness**, "a trustful lamb" (Jeremiah 11.19). He also displays **endurance** in bearing our sufferings and "taking them away" (John 1.29). But in the Primitive Church, the imagery of the lamb speaks about more than the identification of Jesus with our suffering, as his death on the cross redeems us from death. This image also articulates the divine character of Jesus and his glory in heaven before and after the incarnation. Once again, early mosaics show this.

Another depiction of the Lamb of God in Sts Cosmas and Damian refers to the vision of Revelation and "the Lamb who is at the heart of the throne" (Revelation 7.17). This is the slain and triumphant figure who is also associated with Passover and the killing of "a lamb without blemish" (Exodus 12.5).

The Lamb is also spoken of as "the spotless lamb, Christ. He was marked out before the world was made and revealed at the final point of time for your sake" (1 Peter 1.19, 20).

The language about Jesus as the Lamb of God is saying something of fundamental importance to us about the saving work and divine identity of Jesus. The incarnate God, Jesus Christ, who suffers with and for us, existed before time began.

### **Pouring out again**

Still in the greater Christmas season: The mystery of the incarnation brings God close to us. And as Christmas brought the divine to earth we embark on the work of being lifted to the divine.

We can share in that divinity through serving

Not in a Uriah Heep sort of way

Maybe in a way that allows our talents and gifts to be used for the good of the world

### **Emptying**

I need to become spiritually naked, to see right down into the core.

From the desire of being esteemed, deliver me, O Jesus.

From the desire of being loved,

From the desire of being extolled,

From the desire of being honoured,

From the desire of being praised,

From the desire of being preferred to others,

From the desire of being consulted,

From the desire of being approved,

From the fear of being humiliated, deliver me, O Jesus.

From the fear of being despised,

From the fear of suffering rebukes,

From the fear of being calumniated,

From the fear of being forgotten,

From the fear of being ridiculed,

From the fear of being wronged,

From the fear of being suspected,

That others may be loved more than I, O Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

That others may be esteemed more than I,

That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and I may decrease,

That others may be chosen and I set aside,

That others may be praised and I unnoticed,

That others may be preferred to me in everything,

That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should, O Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

## 20 January, Epiphany 3

Evensong, Day of announcement

Psalm 96

Ezekiel 2.1-3.4

Galatians 1.11-24

Journeys are much in my mind at the moment.

Wise men

Holy Family Egypt and back

Jesus in Galilee, baptism

Holy Land. Last Sunday I was in Jerusalem. Sepulchre. St George's. Bar mitzvah – lesson last week in Jerusalem. Shepherds

In the psalm, life's journey flashing before me

Cantate domino, Ascribe unto the Lord, O worship the Lord

Carlisle, Nottingham, Sherwood, Dublin, Durham, Edward's solo

And my life's journey now moves on a step, as you may have heard this morning, and if not ...

Journeying is all about change

Newman: 'To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often'

Heraclitus: *We both step and do not step in the same river.*

So what to do in the face of change?

Ezekiel lived at time when the world must have seemed to be falling apart through unpredictability and change. 'Don't be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions.'

Palestinian Christians

He urged them on in faith. 'eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it. So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.'

Advice to taste what comes our way, take up the unexpected challenges that we are presented with. And the challenge that is before me was unexpected– I was amazed to have phone call last September.

Being sent – also message in MP, Jeremiah: 'I appointed you a prophet to the nations.' Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.' But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, I am only a boy; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you.'

So on we go. Just when we think we're getting the hang of it, something happens to disturb our complacency. Paul and Galatians.

Jewish-Christians from Palestine had visited the Galatians after Paul had left and persuaded some of them that, contrary to Paul, salvation required observance of Jewish laws, including circumcision. Paul writes to rebuke the Galatians, and is full of passion, anger, and drama.

*Read Paul again*

Our journey *through* life is, in fact, a call to journey *into* Life - into fullness of life, which God has opened to us through Jesus the Christ. If we are open to be led by His light, then - like the Magi of old - we shall find ourselves on a journey that forces us to take risks and that will radically change us, from inside out.

Now I set out once again. I don't like being bored – but this is the 5th move in 10 years. Poor Susie.

We ask about change: is it right for me?

My pride starts agonising. But here is this opportunity: Ezekiel: eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it: stop moaning and get on with it.

So off I go again: a restlessness so well expressed by, of course, George Herbert  
Play on rest – state of peace, verb to rest, remainder

The Pulley

When God at first made man,  
Having a glasse of blessings standing by;  
Let us (said he) poure on him all we can:  
Let the worlds riches, which dispersed lie,  
Contract into a span.

So strength first made a way;  
Then beautie flow'd, then wisdom, honour, pleasure:  
When almost all was out, God made a stay,  
Perceiving that alone of all his treasure  
Rest in the bottome lay.

For if I should (said he)  
Bestow this jewell also on my creature,  
He would adore my gifts in stead of me,  
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:  
So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,  
But keep them with repining restlesnesse:  
Let him be rich and wearie, that at least,  
If goodnesse leade him not, yet wearinesse  
May tosse him to my breast.

In this journey, we don't know what the future has in store. Bunyan

Christian said to Evangelist, Whither must I fly? Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, Do you see yonder Wicket-gate? The Man said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining Light? He said, I think I do. Then said Evangelist, Keep that Light in your eye, and go up directly thereto: so shalt thou see the Gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.

Faith in God and Christ Jesus will, I hope, lead me on in the encircling gloom to the shining light. Faith, which for an Anglican like myself, is revealed in Holy Scripture, in reason, in experience and in tradition.

And Ezekiel reminds us of the need to be stubborn and hard-headed in pursuing God's will. The message we have to proclaim will probably not be popular. We must proclaim it all the same, since it brings hope and life to the weary and cynical world. And I could tell you about the hope I saw last week in Bethany from one of the world's saints. But another time.

I've not gone yet, of course, but when I do, is it too much to hope that in the 21 months I'll have been with you, some of you will have had cause to say, as Paul did, 'And they praised God because of me.'

Silence

## **Presentation - Candlemas 2008**

May God open our hearts to his will and may I speak in the name of the Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit

Plagiarism is the highest unintentional compliment one can pay someone. I hope that Stanley will bear that in mind as he will doubtless notice the appearance in this sermon of many of the themes he has put forward during his sojourn in Wirksworth.

I say this not just as this is possibly the last opportunity I shall have to publicly thank him for the inspiration and mental stimulus he has given to me and to many but because if there is anything in this sermon about which you disagree you can take it up with him!

Happy Candlemas, or should I say Happy Groundhog Day, well its a lot easier than saying Happy Presentation of Christ in the Temple Day. Unfortunately it's a lot less informative. I thought I would "Google" Candlemas as a warm-up before writing the sermon. The BBC religious page devotes one paragraph to the religious significance of the day and three pages to the superstitions surrounding it. Did Jesus come to earth so that we could draw conclusions about snowdrops or the movement of wax down a candle? But then that is what we do and countless generations of humans have done before us when we wish to hide an event that challenges us. We swaddle it in twaddle. We bury it so deep in layer upon layer of meaningless irrelevant pap that it ceases to goad us into action let alone provoke thought. And each succeeding generation adds its own defence shield around the event so that now 2000 plus years on it takes dedication to strip away the layers.

I want to touch on three themes tonight, revelation, presentation and light.

Candlemas represents the end of the Christmastide celebrations. It is the end of a season of revelations. Revelations to Mary, to Joseph, to Elizabeth and Zechariah; to shepherds and Kings, to baptismal candidates on the banks of the Jordan, to wedding guests and now to two elderly people in the Temple.

God wasn't revealed to great numbers of people in a stadium, but to small numbers of people and most intimately to individuals. It wasn't following a much heralded build-up; there wasn't time to change into one's best but without prior notice and in the middle of everyday life.

That is how God comes to us. He reveals himself to us on a personal, intimate level in the course of our everyday lives. Sometimes it is not until we look back that, like the wedding guests at Cana, we realise that He was present. He is not interested in receiving worship born of fright but in freely given love no matter how much the candle flame of that love might flicker or how dimly the wick might burn. When we come together in worship we have an opportunity to grow and support others to grow in the love of Christ but even when we are together that love touches us and reveals itself to us individually.

There was a period when I felt somehow inadequate because I had not had a Damascus moment like a number of people I knew. There was no moment of blinding revelation when I could say I became a Christian. Revelation does not have to be instantaneous. It can and frequently does take a lifetime. Given my propensity to cynicism, I now realise that had I have experienced such an event, I would like Scrooge seeing the ghost of Marley, probably have put it down to a badly digested piece of beef and dismissed it. The revelation of faith is life long and moments of enlightenment are not at the time of our choosing. Anna and Simeon did not know when they walked in the precincts of the temple on that day that they would encounter God, least of all God in the form of a baby.

Presentation has been topical theme in our family. About 10 days ago my elder son Joshua was confirmed. At the service two adults from Wirksworth were baptised before they were confirmed. I thought back to Joshua's baptism as a baby. Infant baptism is a bit of a minefield for me, or perhaps in current company I should say a curate's egg. However, just as for Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus in the Temple, it provides an early and valuable lesson to any parent. In bringing children to baptism we are reminded through the act of presentation that they are in a very real sense not our creation but God's, they are not ours to possess and to mould into our likeness. They are given to us by God, a gift certainly, but to treasure not to own. At baptism the child and the parents both stand before their shared Father. Whenever I am frustrated by the actions of my children, I try to think, usually too late, of how frustrating I am to my Heavenly Father. Whatever age we are we remain children of God.

I watched my son kneel before the Bishop to be confirmed. I thought of the time that I had presented myself for confirmation and wished, in part, to return to the level of uncomplicated faith

that I had at the time and which I see in my son today. In this service Stanley will chant the line "The Old man carries the child but the child governs the old man". As we grow older it becomes more and more necessary for us to seek the child within us. Not for any narcissistic reasons but in order to fight off the layers, the hard accretions of cynicism, world weariness and care, that over time build around our soul. For just as superstitions mask the meaning and challenge of Christian festivals so we like Marley forge with the passage of time invisible chains that bind us. In Mark Chpt 10 verse 15 Jesus tells us that "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it". We need to present ourselves before our heavenly Father as a little child full of wonderment, with purity of love and yes with lots of questions. As we get older we seem to ask fewer not more questions. Why is that? Does our joy in the world around us fade, or do we just slowly accept the relentless pressure of society to conform. We are not called upon to be childish but child like. If you have not read it then I urge you to read "Mister God this is Anna" by Fynn. It tells the story of a remarkable and inspirational little girl called Anna and her relationship with "Mister God". It gives a template for all grown-ups seeking the child within and seeking God.

Lastly, the theme of light. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century the Festival of Candlemas began before the dawn with a penitential procession carrying candles. Why is it that somehow we have lost a ceremony with meaning and replaced it with superstitions about snowdrops? Candlemas reminds us that we are called upon to carry the light of Christ into the dark places of the world.

It was not until I was preparing for the discussion session on Jesus and ambition that a verse from St Matthew's gospel which I had heard since childhood suddenly struck me. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven". I had always interpreted it to read let the light of God so shine before men. It is not. Christianity is about the abolition of selfishness not of self. We are the creation of God, created out of love, unique and loved by God our Father for the individuals we are. God wants us to shine with all the potential that he invested in us; not for our selfish benefit but that through the expression of that potential we might cause the light in others to ignite or burn more brightly. And for that light to burn with the radiance we see so often on the face of a child and so rarely on that of an adult. A child's smile is infectious. It lights the faces of those around us. I hope that the child within will come to govern all of our lives; that freed from superstition and the cares of the world we may fulfil our God given potential and light up the lives of those we meet.