

United Benefice of Old Brampton and Great Barlow

Fr Stanley Monkhouse Sermon Archive

Year C – Advent - Lent

Index

Advent 1.....	1
Advent 2, 10 December 2006.....	3
Advent 2 Evensong WW.....	4
Advent 3 - 1.....	6
Advent 3, 17 December 2006.....	7
3 rd Advent Evening.....	9
Advent 4.....	11
Christmas Midnight 2006.....	13
Proper 1, 3 before Lent.....	14
Proper 2, 2 before Lent.....	15
Proper 2, 2 before Lent, Sexagesima.....	17
Proper 3, Next before Lent, Quinquagesima.....	18
Candlemas 28.01.07.....	20
Epiphany 3.....	22

Advent 1

3 December 2006

HC Bonsall, Middleton

- Jeremiah 33: 14-16. Come back to me. I will give you shepherds after my own heart. Ark will be needed no more.
- 1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13. May the Lord make you ...so that you stand before him faultless when Jesus comes.
- Luke 21: 25-36. Son of Man coming on a cloud with power and glory. Be ready.

Advent

- favourite weather.
- exquisite imagery: power coming on a cloud, mystery, roses blooming, fig trees giving forth, seeds germinating
- exquisite music, some of which we'll hear tonight at WW.
- exciting feeling of expectation

I've heard some trashy advent sermons over the last 56 years (let's hope this isn't another), and in one of them advent was compared to preparing to go on a journey – packing the cases, and the car and then journeying towards the destination.

But Advent doesn't mean go, it means 'to come to'

It's not that we go somewhere, but that someone or something comes to us.

It isn't us that is active

So not like preparing for a journey, but like preparing for a guest to arrive.

When we were young, parents, visitors

Making things look good.

Magazines on the table to impress?

So we wait – Expectans expectavi psalm 40, but impatiently in my case.

But advent not just about being passive. In biological terms, there is exchange going on in a pregnant woman's uterus between mother and child. Cells of the embryo are invading the mother, changing her for ever, and the mother, through the placenta, is bringing food to the embryo and removing its waste. This is biological fact.

So at this moment in Mary's uterus Mary is feeding the embryonic Jesus, and Jesus's divine cells are invading Mary's tissues. And since Mary represents humanity, you and me, this is happening within us – you and me.

Lancelot Andrewes 1614

'He was not idle all the time He was an embryo — all the nine months He was in the womb; but then and there He even eat out the core of corruption that cleft to our nature and us, and made both us and it an unpleasing object in the sight of God. [We] were by this means made beloved in Him ... this the good by Christ an embryo.'

The embryonic Lord is eating out the core of corruption within us – if only we will let him.

Exchange – two way. Admirabile commercium. Mary's humanity and Jesus's divinity exchanged. God became man so that man might become God (Irenaeus).

SO It's not passive for God, Jesus.

And neither for us, because we have to prepare to receive. Like when we are expecting visitors.

RUSSIAN DOLLS HERE

We already have the divine core within us, but we have let it be clouded, covered, obscured by the layers of sin (our doing) and by layers of scar tissue laid down as a result of the hurts inflicted on us by others.

By getting down to the inner, divine core, that is unprotected – yes. But because of this, its light shines brighter to those outside. Unprotected – yes, but seeing more clearly – clairvoyant.

So how can we do this?

We can start by self examination.

Letting the light within shine into the deepest darkest corners to dissolve these layers

Let there be light – another Advent image

Clearing out the clutter

Letting the light dissolve away the unnecessary coatings

So, allowing the divine core to work from the inside, not resisting

Then when we are ready, there **is** an element of going out to meet him, as Luke tells us.

- We need to be ready to recognise God's arrival.
- We don't have to be perfect, just open, free of things that blind us and bind us – attachments, shoulds and oughts, expectations of others.
- Like children. This is liberty, freedom.
- We listen to the still small voice within and **start cooperating** with it.
- God's filling our skins from the inside – **we don't resist** him.

I've spent too much of my life resting what my inner voice was telling me, for the sake of trying to please other people, and I know that when I stop resisting, it's a very personal and overwhelming thing. It's like two parts of me coming together, no, no, it **IS** two parts of me coming together, and Christians would call one of those parts God. God within filling my skin. Father going out to meet his prodigal son and flinging his arms around him. Skin to skin, interpenetration of bodies, eating flesh and drinking blood. That is why the Holy Communion is such a personal, intimate thing.

I know people who dislike Holy Communion services for that reason. Why some prefer Matins and Evensong at which God is one step removed, where there is not that personal contact.

The personal contact that comes when I look into the eyes of a child, and I forget all the cynicism and hardheartedness that 56 years of life has covered me in. The eyes of a child – Jesus encourages us to be as children.

Let me read to you a poem that for me brings together these two themes of **waiting** and **cooperating or not resisting**.

About Sorley

From morn to midnight, all day through,

I laugh and play as others do,
I sin and chatter, just the same
As others with a different name.

And all year long upon the stage,
I dance and tumble and do rage
So vehemently, I scarcely see
The inner and eternal me.

I have a temple I do not
Visit, a heart I have forgot,
A self that I have never met,
A secret shrine—and yet, and yet

This sanctuary of my soul
Unwitting I keep white and whole,
Unlatched and lit, if Thou should'st care
To enter or to tarry there.

With parted lips and outstretched hands
And listening ears Thy servant stands,
Call Thou early, call Thou late,
To Thy great service dedicate.

There is an advent challenge. It is this sanctuary of my soul, kept white and whole, that aches for the Lord's coming in glory. It is this secret shrine that we keep hidden that we need to gain access to by **flinging wide the gates. Macht hoch die Tür. Fling wide the gates of that secret shrine, and let the Christ within fill our skins.**

The divine Christ is already at work in us – always has been
Advent is a time when we can Expectans expectavi – sit back and cooperate with the divine Christ within - wait for him to break through,
and when you feel it happening, go ye out to meet him.

Advent Vesper responsory

Stand ye still, and ye shall see the salvation of the Lord
Tomorrow, go ye forth, and the Lord, he will be with you.

Advent 2, 10 December 2006

HC Wirksworth

John Baptist
Difficult man
JB was evasive. Who am I?
What would we make of him?

Honey
Locusts – I'm a celebrity – get me out of here
Forerunner?
Why was he so off-putting? Even in that context at that time? Would it not have suited Jesus' message more to have a smooth-as-silk spin doctor? Well since they ooze insincerity from every pore, perhaps not.
Bad medicine etc.
Apocalyptic – mistake

So, a difficult man
Short shrift if he turned up in most Anglican churches today
God is Englishman – Germany recently
JB was certainly an outsider

Can learn much from outsiders

Only way that new things happen

Otherwise stagnation

People need to push at edges all the time – crucifixion is hat results for them, but progress for everyone else

And that we can learn from someone younger than ourselves

I know this at the moment -

And also message for ourselves

I'm big on the psychological message of the gospel

Examples – children, attachments, poverty

And sometimes the things that jolt us into thinking that something needs attention is a niggle inside that we vehemently deny – inconvenient like the Baptist

Thos inner voices that we would like to ignore – too inconvenient

May

Paul's conversion – things niggled at him, and then something overwhelmed him

Apocalyptic – mistake

Christianity is a religion of failed prophecies – but lots of hope

Advent 2 Evensong WW

10 December 2006

- Isaiah 40: 1-11. Comfort ye. Zion. Rough smooth, valleys, shepherds, Messiah.
- Luke 1: 1-25. Zechariah, dumb, ?because of doubt?

Advent

- favourite weather.
- exquisite imagery: power coming on a cloud, mystery, roses blooming, fig trees giving forth, seeds germinating
- exquisite music, some of which we'll hear tonight at WW.
- exciting feeling of expectation

I've heard some trashy advent sermons over the last 56 years (let's hope this isn't another), and in one of them advent was compared to preparing to go on a journey – packing the cases, and the car and then journeying towards the destination.

But Advent doesn't mean go, it means 'to come to'

It's not that we go somewhere, but that someone or something comes to us.

It isn't us that is active

So not like preparing for a journey, but like preparing for a guest to arrive.

When we were young, parents, visitors

Making things look good.

Magazines on the table to impress?

So we wait – Expectans expectavi psalm 40, but impatiently in my case.

But advent not just about being passive. In biological terms, there is exchange going on in a pregnant woman's uterus between mother and child. Cells of the embryo are invading the mother, changing her for ever, and the mother, through the placenta, is bringing food to the embryo and removing its waste. This is biological fact.

So at this moment in Mary's uterus Mary is feeding the embryonic Jesus, and Jesus's divine cells are invading Mary's tissues. And since Mary represents humanity, you and me, this is happening within us – you and me.

Lancelot Andrewes 1614

'He was not idle all the time He was an embryo — all the nine months He was in the womb;

but then and there He even eat out the core of corruption that cleft to our nature and us, and

made both us and it an unpleasing object in the sight of God. [We] were by this means made beloved in Him ... this the good by Christ an embryo.'
The embryonic Lord is eating out the core of corruption within us – if only we will let him.

Exchange – two way. Admirabile commercium. Mary's humanity and Jesus's divinity exchanged. God became man so that man might become God (Irenaeus).
SO It's not passive for God, Jesus.

And neither for us, because we have to prepare to receive. Like when we are expecting visitors.

RUSSIAN DOLLS HERE

We already have the divine core within us, but we have let it be clouded, covered, obscured by the layers of sin (our doing) and by layers of scar tissue laid down as a result of the hurts inflicted on us by others.

By getting down to the inner, divine core, that is unprotected – yes. But because of this, its light shines brighter to those outside. Unprotected – yes, but seeing more clearly – clairvoyant.

So how can we do this?

We can start by self examination.

Letting the light within shine into the deepest darkest corners to dissolve these layers

Let there be light – another Advent image

Clearing out the clutter

Letting the light dissolve away the unnecessary coatings

So, allowing the divine core to work from the inside, not resisting

Then when we are ready, there **is** an element of going out to meet him, as Luke tells us.

- We need to be ready to recognise God's arrival.
- We don't have to be perfect, just open, free of things that blind us and bind us – attachments, shoulds and oughts, expectations of others.
- Like children. This is liberty, freedom.
- We listen to the still small voice within and **start cooperating** with it.
- God's filling our skins from the inside – **we don't resist** him.

I've spent too much of my life resting what my inner voice was telling me, for the sake of trying to please other people, and I know that when I stop resisting, it's a very personal and overwhelming thing. It's like two parts of me coming together, no, no, it **IS** two parts of me coming together, and Christians would call one of those parts God. God within filling my skin. Father going out to meet his prodigal son and flinging his arms around him. Skin to skin, interpenetration of bodies, eating flesh and drinking blood. That is why the Holy Communion is such a personal, intimate thing.

I know people who dislike Holy Communion services for that reason. Why some prefer Matins and Evensong at which God is one step removed, where there is not that personal contact. The personal contact that comes when I look into the eyes of a child, and I forget all the cynicism and hardheartedness that 56 years of life has covered me in. The eyes of a child – Jesus encourages us to be as children.

Let me read to you a poem that for me brings together these two themes of **waiting** and **cooperating or not resisting**.

About Sorley

From morn to midnight, all day through,
I laugh and play as others do,
I sin and chatter, just the same
As others with a different name.

And all year long upon the stage,
I dance and tumble and do rage
So vehemently, I scarcely see

The inner and eternal me.

I have a temple I do not
Visit, a heart I have forgot,
A self that I have never met,
A secret shrine—and yet, and yet

This sanctuary of my soul
Unwitting I keep white and whole,
Unlatched and lit, if Thou should'st care
To enter or to tarry there.

With parted lips and outstretched hands
And listening ears Thy servant stands,
Call Thou early, call Thou late,
To Thy great service dedicate.

There is an advent challenge. It is this sanctuary of my soul, kept white and whole, that aches for the Lord's coming in glory. It is this secret shrine that we keep hidden that we need to gain access to by **flinging wide the gates. Macht hoch die Tür. Fling wide the gates of that secret shrine, and let the Christ within fill our skins.**

The divine Christ is already at work in us – always has been
Advent is a time when we can Expectans expectavi – sit back and cooperate with the divine Christ within - wait for him to break through,
and when you feel it happening, go ye out to meet him.

**Then we shall cooperate with the Lord
Until then, it as as if we have been dumb, like Zechariah.**

Advent Vesper responsory

Stand ye still, and ye shall see the salvation of the Lord
Tomorrow, go ye forth, and the Lord, he will be with you.

Advent 3 - 1

We're used to the idea of thinking of JB as the forerunner, the one who prepares the way of the Lord. And so he is. But he is something else as well. JB is one of the great Hebrew prophets, in the line of Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos. The people who make us feel uncomfortable by telling us truths we would rather not hear. The people who force us to confront things as they really are, rather than allowing us to continue in our own deluded way. All pastors have to be prophets: the most pastoral act any priest can perform is to help someone to confront the truth of their situation. Prophets of our own day include the great Desmond Tutu. He insisted that healing could only follow when the people of S Africa confronted the reality of their past. The abscess can only heal when the pus is brought into the daylight, not buried under layers of elastoplasts. This is uncomfortable stuff. It is, as I heard yesterday from the lips of a fellow priest in the presence of the Bishop, my job to disturb the comfortable, as well as comfort the disturbed.

It's always tempting, when we think about people like JB, to think that the story is about other people. About them 2000 years ago, about them out there, or her or him. It's always difficult to acknowledge that the uncomfortable truths are about ourselves. It's easier to find fault with others rather than with ourselves. It's easier to see the splinter in someone else's eye than the beam in our own. We push to the back of our minds the inconvenient truth that we know that what we're doing is wrong, and we scratch around trying to find some justification for it.

We criticize, rightly, the appalling behavior of MPs as pigs with their noses in the trough. We demand resignations and retribution. And yet how many of us would be able to resist the same temptation? How many of us are able to resist the temptation to nick paper from the photocopier at work, or steal a chocolate from an unattended box? Something niggles away in our midst and tells us not to do it, and yet we do it—knowing, somewhere inside us—that we shouldn't. This niggles that tells us we shouldn't have done this or that is our very own prophet living inside our very own mind.

Our very own John Baptist.

The people in today's Gospel think John the Baptist must be the Christ, when all he is doing is telling them things they already know—things they shouldn't be doing. The tax collectors know they shouldn't cheat their own people. The soldiers know they shouldn't practice extortion. The MPs know they shouldn't be screwing the taxpayers. But they do it. We do it.

John isn't calling them to a radically different life. He doesn't tell the tax collectors to stop collecting taxes. He doesn't tell the soldiers to give up soldiering. He simply calls them to do what they already know to be right.

There's nothing foolish in these people's wanting to go to someone who sees their moral situation more clearly and can say the things they know to be true, but have conveniently forgotten. Hearing it out of someone else's mouth is challenging—but strangely compelling. They respond to being recalled to themselves, reminded of what they already know, with a certain kind of awe.

John, however, knows that that will not be enough on its own, that what he offers is not the transformation that they really need. Repentance, which is John's message, is a very important part of what we all need, but it's only a part of what will save us; and when I say 'save us', I mean save us from ourselves—salvation from the moral forgetfulness, the moral evasion, that we weave inside and around ourselves—the terrible harm we do to ourselves and others when we act from that forgetfulness.

The tax collectors of the Gospel might well have gone away and tried a bit harder to straighten out their lives, but inevitably, like us, like the MPs, the world was so full of temptations to injustice, no doubt they would soon be up to their old tricks. Like MPs.

We wait with eagerness for the coming of Jesus at Christmas, because through his human life we have an example to show us the way, and we have the assurance of forgiveness when we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves down, and start all over again.

At Barlow

The birth of XXX brings hope to David and Tetyana, to family and friends. Children are a sign of hope for the future, the hope of so many great possibilities, as yet unfulfilled. The birth of the Christ-child brings not just hope for himself but hope for us. We've most of us – at my age anyway - squandered the hope of our births, and for that we need to repent and find forgiveness. But the hope Christ brings is a new birth, not just a second chance. It's a return to the hope of our childhood and even more: a new and certain hope of eternal life, fulfilled life, life of delight lived to the full.

At Loundsley Green

All churches need the voice of a prophet to call them to a realistic view of what is possible in the future, and to prevent them from becoming just a group of people who gather together for a rather peculiar Sunday morning hobby. This church at this moment in its history needs the voice of a prophet to call us to a realistic view of what is possible for us in the future, to read the signs of the times so that we can plan realistically for the immediate and mid-term future. Let us not shrink from that difficult task, and let us take comfort from the fact that it is divine activity, godly activity, incarnational activity, to get our hands dirty in the muddy business of being human, warts and all.

JB calls us to see ourselves as others see us: stripped of pretence, imperfect, not in control, fallible human beings. That's what makes us lovable.

O wad some Power the giftie gie us To see oursels as ithers see us!

Advent 3, 17 December 2006

HC Middleton

Zephaniah 3:14-20.

Philippians 4:4-7.

Luke 3:7-18.

I would expect for the three Sundays in Advent available to us this year that we would have a general 'what is Advent?' Sunday, a John the Baptist Sunday, and a Mary Sunday. That's not how the readings come across this year, and I've found the lessons that are set difficult to develop. SO I'm just going to take them at face value and see what we get.

In Zechariah we have the story of God restoring what was lost, and causing good things to happen. And in verse 20 we hear that God will bring us home. In the epistle we have the wonderful encouragement to rejoice and trust in the lord always, never to doubt his faithfulness to us. But the message in the gospel is one of warning and admonishing. We are told how to behave. We must share. We must not cheat. Actions are necessary: behaviours are necessary. It is not enough simply to be members of the right club (children of Abraham). Nor two coats, or treasures, or whatever. The last thing we must ever be is complacent.

Perhaps we'll start with that. John was a difficult man. Odd in appearance, odd in diet, and self-effacing.

Short shrift if he turned up in most Anglican churches today.

JB was certainly an outsider.

Can learn much from outsiders

Only way that new things happen

Otherwise stagnation

People need to push at edges all the time – crucifixion is what results for them, but progress for everyone else.

JB is challenging the people against complacency.

This in itself is a great message. **We must listen to outsiders.** They tell us things that we don't want to hear about ourselves, about our society, but things that speak of the corruption and greed in society.

- There shouldn't need to be prostitutes in Ipswich or Derby if society was justly organised.
- There shouldn't be young homeless people in one of the wealthiest countries of the world – obscenity, more so than sex.
- Capitalism forces us into a competitive struggle. Our security is not to be found in dividing us from one another, but in community. It is in supporting one another, to know that if we fall on difficult times, we have a community willing to support us. This is where security really lies.
- **Disadvantaged people are prophets in society – people who reveal our values, make us uncomfortable.**

Mary too was an outsider. Teenage pregnancy, no father.

Mary the outsider said yes to the Lord.

Mary the outsider provided a home for Jesus to grow and develop.

We have to be outsiders to provide homes for others to grow and develop.

As Jesus changed Mary as a result of developing in her.

We change as a result of allowing others to grow in us.

This means being open minded. If we earnestly want one thing to happen, we are blind to all the other opportunities that may come our way.

Car journey – looking for one thing.

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope

For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love

For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith

But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.

Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:

So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing. Eliot: *East Coker* (1940).

And this means losing my selfness, or rather, absorbing the other person into my selfness. As I feel more and more at home with myself, I can begin losing myself in God, and thus in fellow humans: Rahner 'the love of God and the love of neighbour are one and the same thing'.

This takes great courage. It's easy to fall short when the pressures of life oppress, part of the cross we have to bear living in an imperfect world.

Bit the model is that of the prodigally gracious father.

This losing of self in the other is exactly what the incarnation is all about, exactly what JB is telling us in today's gospel.

Lavinia Byrne: 'To sidetrack people into preoccupation with their own salvation is to mutilate the gospel message' and my salvation comes from helping others to find theirs.

As minister, my job is to prepare the ground for the Holy Spirit to act, so that like the woman of Samaria at the well, we all can realise that the source of our own lives, and the potential for growth, lies within. When this happens, 'so many of our familiar categories have to be reappraised.'

We have to step out of our comfort zone if we are to develop. We can use Advent, and the message of JB and the example of Mary, to set us up for the new life in Christ.

Home is not where you are comfortable.

What is there to help us on our way?

The epistle

The Holy Spirit

Holy Wisdom

We need courage, discernment, wisdom.

O sapientia. O wisdom, that camest out of the mouth of the Most high, reaching from one end to another, firmly and gently ordering all things: come and teach us the way of understanding.

3rd Advent Evening

17 December 2006

Heavenly Father, give us the faith to receive your Word, the understanding to know what it means, and the courage to put it into practice; through Jesus Christ our Lord

I am a great fan of the the late American comedian Bob Newhart. Reading the passage for Isaiah reminded me of a skit that he wrote imagining a conversation between an official of the West Indies Company and Sir Walter Raleigh called the Introduction of Tobacco. Part of it goes like this

Hey Harry, you want to pick up the extension I've got nutty Wal on the phone.

Hey Wal, how are you? Have you got another winner for us Wal? What have you got for us this time?

What's that Wal? You've got what? You've got a boatload of leaves for us Wal. Say Wal this might come as a surprise to you but come autumn in England we're kind of up to our In leaves Wal!

When you have been up to your... in water for the last many weeks it is difficult to appreciate the full beauty of a passage which talks of more water welling up in the middle of the arid desert. In fact had Isaiah lived in Wirksworth he might have grown to like deserts and sunny weather.

So I would like you to shut your eyes, those of you who haven't already been tempted to do so and in your imagination leave a dark wet chilly Wirksworth and come with me to a place where Isaiah's vision occurs on an annual basis.

We are going to Oman. It is late June. The temperature in the piercing sunshine is 50 degrees C. You cannot stand too close to walls because the heat is so intense. It cuts into your throat as you leave your air conditioned room and climb into the taxi for the journey to the airport. We are catching an internal flight from the capital Muscat to travel 900 kms south to the coastal town of Salalah. It nestles by the sea under a steep escarpment which rises to a spine of mountains or jebels running westwards into the Yemen. Just to give a Christmas flavour this is the land of the Queen of Sheba where the highest quality Frankincense is harvested.

On the flight down there is little to see. It is a harsh landscape. Sand disappears and is replaced by outcrops of bare limestone. One road links Muscat with Salalah. It winds through the occasional oases, one horse or more realistically one-camel towns. After just over an hour the plane starts its descent and suddenly you see the escarpment and Salalah stretched alongside the shoreline. At one end the port, two animal feedmills (the reason for my many visits) and at the other the Royal Farm

and Palace. The present Sultan's Mother was a local Jebali – a person living in the mountains above Salalah and the Sultan's regular visits to the region hold the loyalty of these people.

We have arrived a little before the annual phenomenon is known as the Hareef. Every year the edge of the mountains around Salalah catch the tail end of the Indian monsoons. For six weeks it rains, quite literally in the desert and just as in the reading from Isaiah the desert blossoms abundantly. Waters break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand does become a pool. Grass carpets arid soil. Trees break out into leaf and everywhere one sees beautiful and exotic flowers and insects. Streams flow in the dried river beds or wadis and the mountains are transformed from inhospitable barren places to a lush green curtain draped behind a now bustling city. It is not just the landscape that is transformed but people also.

Salalah wakes up. For just this short period people from all over the Gulf come to Salalah. Like us they fly or drive in their thousands down the one road. They come to escape the stifling heat of the desert kingdoms; the stress of the rapid growth in their region. They come just to walk in the cool rain, to paddle in the streams and to witness the transformation from a sterile desert to an abundance of life. They come to be refreshed; to be renewed.

Isaiah's great vision of hope reached out to a scattered people in exile. It foretells of a time of transformation when the Promised Land and God's people will be restored and refreshed.

It is a vision of homecoming; a return for a prodigal people after a period of despair and distress. It offers the exciting prospect of leaving a foreign land living under pagan rulers and travelling home along God's highway made solely for his forgiven people; to once again live under the loving rule of God.

It is a return not to the land as they had left it, torn and ravaged by the destruction of war and the decay of neglect but to a land as fertile as the best in the region, Lebanon Carmel and Sharon.

Isaiah gives us a vision of wholeness where land and people are made new again. The land is raised from sterility to fertility and to such abundance that even the land rejoices. The people are made whole, weaknesses are strengthened, disabilities are cured, despair is banished. God is announced and He has come to save.

It is a wonderful and thrilling prediction and we as Christians know that it came to pass. God in Christ makes all things new. Christ fulfilled Isaiah's prophecies. He made the blind to see, the dumb to talk and the lame to leap and all, just like Zechariah, in tonight's New Testament reading responded in the only way possible when faced with God's overwhelming love they overflowed with joy and worship. Isaiah's prophecy, now fulfilled by the coming of Jesus has been fulfilled. It is a one time only event but thank God the cycle of renewal in the world and in our lives is constant.

After six to eight weeks the rain stops in Salalah, the streams cease to flow, the grass dies, the trees become dormant, the heat returns and the dust swirls through the quiet streets.

In our journey of faith we do not always walk alongside refreshing waters. We, like the Jewish exiles of Isaiah, spend time walking through dry places where there is often little if anything at times to nourish and sustain our faith. Cynicism, like the desert dust, can settle on us drying up the fertility of our imaginations. Tiredness and the burdens of life often make rejoicing too much effort. We cease to see the wonder of our journey only its length. Like the Jewish people we have a tendency to be prodigal, to wander down byways of our own choosing. Too often we place ourselves in self-imposed exile from God. Advent calls us to re-trace our steps and place ourselves back on the highway which Jesus by the example of His life on earth has prepared for us.

Advent is a time of anticipation and preparation; a time to shake off the dust of cynicism and anticipate walking in the refreshing rain of the love of God. It is a time to prepare to see all things new again; to follow our Lord's teaching to look at the Kingdom of God with the excitement and wonderment of a child. Only then will we experience the joy that comes from being fully refreshed.

Frederick Buechner wrote "Joy is home.... God created us in joy and in the long run not all the darkness there is in the world and in ourselves can separate us finally from that joy". That is the message of Christmas.

Not all of us can move let alone sing like Gene Kelly but as Christians all of us spend Advent preparing to go singing in the God's rain at Christmas. Happy Advent and Happy Christmas!

Amen.

Advent 4

Longing

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, **whose origin is from of old, from ancient days**. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace. If the Assyrians come into our land and tread upon our soil, we will raise against them seven shepherds and eight installed as rulers.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the **child leapt in her womb**. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

And Mary said MAGNIFICAT

Longing

Parallels

God the Holy Spirit overshadowed and then indwelt the Ark. The Ark became the dwelling place of the presence of God [Exodus 40:34-35]

God the Holy Spirit overshadowed and the indwelt Mary. At that time Mary's womb became the dwelling place of the presence of God [Luke 1:35].

The Ark contained the 10 Commandments [the words of God in stone], a pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that came back to life [Deuteronomy 10:3-5; Hebrews 9:4].

The womb of the Virgin contained Jesus: the living Word of God enfleshed, the living bread from heaven, "the Branch" (Messianic title) who would die but come back to life [Luke 1:35].

The Ark traveled to the hill country of Judah to rest in the house of Obed-edom [2 Samuel 6:1-11]

Mary traveled to the hill country of Judah (Judea) to the home of Elizabeth [Luke 1:39]

Dressed in a priestly ephod, King David approached the Ark and danced and leapt for joy [2 Samuel 6:14]

John the Baptist, son of a priest who would himself become a priest, leapt for joy in Elizabeth's womb at the approach of Mary [Luke 1:43]

David shouted for joy in the presence of God and the holy Ark [2 Samuel 6:15]

Elizabeth exclaimed with a loud cry of joy in the presence God within Mary [Luke 1:42]

David asked, "How is it that the Ark of the Lord comes to me?" [2 Samuel 6:9]

Elizabeth asks, "Why is this granted unto me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" [Luke 1:43]

The Ark remained in the house of Obed-edom for 3 months [2 Samuel 6:11]

Mary remained in the house of her cousin Elizabeth for 3 months [Luke 1:56]

The house of Obed-edom was blessed by the presence of the Ark [2 Samuel 6:11]

The word "blessed" is used 3 times in Luke 1:39-45 concerning Mary at Elizabeth's house.

The Ark returned to its sanctuary and eventually ends up in Jerusalem where the presence and glory of God is revealed in the newly built Temple [2 Samuel 6:12; 1 Kings 8:9-11]

Mary returned home from visiting Elizabeth and eventually comes to Jerusalem, where she presents God the Son in the Temple [Luke 1:56; 2:21-22]

God made Aaron's rod (which would be kept in the Ark) return to life and budded to prove he was the legitimate High Priest [Numbers 17:8].

God would resurrect His Son, who had become enfleshed in Mary's womb and born to bring

salvation to all mankind, to prove He is the eternal High Priest [Hebrews 4: 14].

When the Ark was outside the Holy of Holies [when it was being transported] it was to be covered with a blue veil [Numbers 4:4-6]

In Mary's appearances outside of heaven visionaries testify that she wears a blue veil.

In Revelation 11: 19 John sees the Ark of the Covenant in heaven [this is the last verse of chapter 11]

In Revelation 12: 1 John sees Mary in heaven. It is the same vision Juan Diego saw of Mary in 1531—the Woman clothed with the sun and standing on the moon.

He is, as today's First Reading says, the "ruler...whose origin is from...ancient times." He will come from Bethlehem, where David was born of Jesse and anointed king.

God promised that an heir of David would reign on his throne forever.

Jesus is that heir, the One the prophets promised would restore the scattered tribes of Israel into a new kingdom. He is "the shepherd of Israel," From His throne in heaven, He has "come to save us."

All this is recognized by John when he leaps for joy in his mother's womb. Elizabeth is filled with joy and recognizes that in Mary "the mother of my Lord" has come to her. Elizabeth blesses Mary for her faith that God's Word would be fulfilled in her.

The Church in her liturgy and tradition has long praised Mary as "the Ark of the New Covenant."

The Greek word Luke uses to describe Elizabeth's loud cry of joy (anaphoneo) isn't used anywhere else in the New Testament. And it's found in only five places in the Greek Old Testament - every time used to describe "exultation" before the Ark (see 1 Chronicles 15:28; 16:4-5; 2 Chronicles 5:13).

Coincidences? Hardly. The old Ark contained the tablets of the Law, the manna from the desert and the priestly staff of Aaron (see Hebrews 9:4).

In Mary, the new Ark, we find the Word of God, the Bread of Life and the High Priest of the new people of God (see also Catechism, no. 2676).

Mary is you and me.

We are the ark.

In a way, that is the trend of salvation history: God utterly other, to God both within and without. Immanent and transcendent.

A glorious exchange

bread, meat – anyway food

church as food

not just the intellectual part of Christianity

but the physical part: the sounds, the sights, the smells

desiring god. John Neaum

have sense of longing for God

The 'supernatural existential', therefore, present in all humanity tends dynamically towards its irrevocable climax in Jesus Christ.

The other assumption is that we have in us a longing for something else. And I'm certain we all have this hole within. Some people go to football matches for it. Some people long for chocolate. Some people go shopping—and we see the agony when suddenly it dawns that shopping power is being curtailed by economic circumstance.

But everything fails to satisfy what Schopenhauer calls “a certain trace of silent sadness... a consciousness that results from knowledge of the vanity of all achievements and of the suffering of all life, not merely one’s own.”

Some of us call this the inclination to the divine. I think it is in our every cell, put there as a result of the divine-human exchange that took place in Mary’s uterus as she nurtured the growing embryonic Lord within her. We are God’s, we belong to God, we are of the divine, from the moment of creation. We need to let this urge for the divine, flower through prayer and meditation and worship—and enjoyment of life.

Our response is to hearken to it: a word that carries with it a sense of listening, certainly, but also one of acting in accordance with what we hear: aligning our will with the divine will. It’s a difficult job amidst all the static we get from consumerism and the evils of advertising, but we bash on in hope.

Not a longing to power, but a longing to fulfilment.

All this comes from the example of Mary: to accept that we are not in control, to yield to power.

Christmas Midnight 2006

HC Bradbourne

The word is made flesh and dwelt among us. For the next few minutes I want to unpack that, and explore what seem to me to be some of its implications.

The Word

Word is not what we think of as word – it’s much more. It’s the name given to the system that underpins everything – God. It includes the laws of nature – part of God. The Greek word for it is *logos*, from which we get logical. So *word* in Scripture means something much bigger than what we mean by it. Word existed with God at creation – the big bang – the stardust out of which we are made, possibly.

Became flesh

- This *logos*, word, rational system, then becomes flesh. Jesus is human *logos*; the human form of God. Jesus is God. The human Jesus is the human expression of natural law. Jesus is the example by which we aim to live life. We need to listen to what he says, and act upon it. It’s as simple as that.
- Incarnation involves a normal human pregnancy. God couldn’t get *more* involved with human experience than that. From a one-celled embryo to a complex multicellular baby. God involves Godself in human affairs, in life on the planet, from one-celled embryo onwards.
- God does this in spectacular fashion by using an unmarried teenage girl, by announcing the birth to the lowest of the low, for that is what shepherds were regarded as. What messages does this give us about God’s attitudes to those in society that we reject or despise?

And dwelt among us

- From conception to adulthood, Jesus participated in and suffered every human emotion, every human experience. Joy and laughter, sadness and weeping, luxury and privation, cruelty and pain.
- And what is more, he developed from embryo to adult over a third of a century. He developed as we develop. His thinking developed (in as far as we can tell) as does ours. He suffered the ravages of ageing just like you and me.

So what – 4 things

1. That God involved himself with human affairs, it seems to me, gives us divine approval, permission, to be human in the fullest sense of the word. We can simply be – we don’t need to earn the right to exist. We can enjoy the good things of this life. Jesus’ teaching tells us time and again that we are right to live life to the full, to make the most of what we have been given, and the situation we find ourselves in. There is nothing ascetic about Christianity, despite the fact that that is how it has often been perverted over the centuries into a religion of *shalt nots*. There is no need for Christians to be miserable killjoys – indeed, so to be so is, in my opinion, unchristian.

2. Christmas is for giving: God to humanity, Wise men to Jesus, and we to each other – and not just boxes of chocolate and toys. Because by giving to each other of our skills and love and respect and work, we are giving to God. Make no mistake about that.
3. The wise men followed a star, and so should we. We have permission to follow our star, to throw caution to the wind, to take risks. Herod tried to stop the wise men finding the prize, and the Herod parts of us sometimes try to pour cold water on the creative flames within us. Don't let us be like Herod: let's be creative and take risks.
4. This divine permission to be creative and fully human gives us permission to make mistakes. Mistakes are necessary for growth. And when we make mistakes, and who doesn't, we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves down and start all over again – if we recognise the mistakes as such, and intend to live a new life. We are forgiven. Not only is Christmas for giving, but also Christmas is for forgiving. And the most difficult part of this is forgiving ourselves.
5. So all we have to do is obey his teaching word for word, and rigidly follow his example? Well, no. Remember that from the moment of his conception and throughout his life, Jesus changed and developed, and his thinking developed. He lived and developed in the community. And if we want to follow his example, so must we. Communities change, world affairs change, and we need to interpret Jesus' teaching in the world in which we live. Christianity is dynamic, plastic; it is compassionate. It's not so much a matter of doing what Jesus did, but rather of doing what we think Jesus would do if he were in the position we are in.

The only fundamental rule is that we love neighbour as ourselves (not better than). In short, this means doing to others as you would like them to do to you, or put another, better, way, not doing anything to others that you wouldn't like them to do to you. When we look around the affairs of the country, the world, we don't have to look far to see what happens when this is ignored.

Summing up

The incarnation, that developmental process, means that

- we are right to interpret Christ's teaching in the circumstances in which we find ourselves.
- we are right to make the most of what we have been given, to follow our stars, to take risks.
- we have a Christian duty to enjoy ourselves, and do everything in our power to enable everyone else to enjoy themselves – not in the way that we would wish, but in the way that they would wish.
- and finally, we are forgiven. Forgiveness is there for the taking, in the air around us, we breathe it in and move through it. All we have to do is accept it and let it work with us.

Is not this wonderful news?

There's an old English carol memorably set to music by RWV in his Fantasia, two verses of which say all that needs to be said:

- This is the truth sent from above, the truth of God, the God of love
- Therefore don't turn me from your door, but hearken all both rich and poor.
- Thus he in love to us behaved, to show us how we must be saved
- And if you want to know the way, be pleased to hear what he did say.

A very happy, blessed and peaceful Christmas to you all.

Proper 1, 3 before Lent

Bradbourne HC

04 February 2007

Isaiah 6:1-8 (9-13)

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

I saw a good programme. Muslims, alcohol
 Why do we criticise Muslims for
 We should be doing it too.

We need courage.

Isaiah: send me. Awe. Worship. Inadequacy. Send me. I am pardoned. To talk to people who don't listen. Vision brings knowledge that his people will be all but destroyed.
Curious mixture of awe and intimacy.

1 Corinthians: He appeared even to me.
Remain courageous in face of attacks on our religion.
Act, don't just sit and talk.

No more hiding our light under a bushel – it is not ours to hide.

And let me have no false modesty about this. I help nobody by hiding my light in case it embarrasses others, and I certainly do not help myself. It is, in any case, not my light to hide.

'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.'
Marianne Williamson Return to Love, p 165

'The incarnation', writes Metropolitan Anthony, 'reveals to us that man is so great that he can unite himself with God without ceasing to be man in the full sense of the word; that he is so vast that he contains the divine presence, that there is at the core of each of us what the Archbishop of Canterbury once called a God-shaped emptiness which nothing can fill which is of the earth or of heaven or of the created, but God alone.'

I say that it is *not* that we have a God-shaped *emptiness* inside — *God is there*. It is rather that we fail to recognize God as such, that we turn our faces from the revelation within. Divine love is already within us from the beginning. Redemption is there for the taking if we will but accept it.

Luke: boat, cast other side, never done that before. Wonderful result. Take risks.
Leave me sinner that I am, says (Simon) Peter. But no. Jesus puts faith in him. Faith is repaid a thousandfold.

Proper 2, 2 before Lent

Elton HC
11 February 2007

Genesis 2:4b-9,15-25. second creation, woman, approval of family man leaving parents etc. Man and woman become one flesh.

Revelation 4. worship. Awe. Fantastic

Luke 8:22-25. Calming storm. Where is your faith.

After all the excitement of Christmas we're now in what is ordinary time.
I like ordinary time. Reflection, catching up, growth.

So what can I reflect from these lessons. There is so much that I could preach on today.

- The two creation stories, how they differ, and what this tells us about our attitudes to scripture.
- I could preach about how man came first and woman is merely the extra. Or perhaps, biologically, that it is the other way round – that scripture has it wrong – woman is the basic form and man the refinement.
- And I could preach about how we are formed from the earth (Adam) and to the earth we shall return. Scientifically, of course, this is absolutely true. We are formed from the material of the earth, of the universe, the chemicals, the molecules, the atoms, the subatomic particles of which the universe is made – the stardust if you like that resulted from the big bang. And when we die, When the worms come and eat us up, these same subatomic particles that have been you and me will once more go back to the general melee in the universe, and be made into something else. If we call God the sum total of everything in the universe, then we certainly return to God.

What is explicit in all this is change and growth.

Journeys.

And the expulsion from Eden is, if you like, a saga of the journey of life – we left the Garden of Eden – that is existence in God, and we then go on life's journey until finally we return to him. We seek to rise. And in so doing we leave our parents and form new relationships.

This formation of new relationships is an expression in love.
God is love, so it is done in God.

No clinging. You'll remember that Jesus advised us to shed the family – for new relationships. We must leave our parents, but never forget from where we come.

In all our relationships we should remember that we are made in God's image.
We are all children of God.
Gays. If you draw a line, J is on other side of it.

Jesus is the perfect reflection of God – wisdom terminology. We have Christ within, as Paul and the church fathers tell us. And all of us will see the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, and approach that image as Wesley says: finish then thy new creation.

Gospel

In times of difficulty, trust in God.
Throughout our journey
Calming storm then
Calming storm now

Both

We come from God, we depend on God
So we can rely on God

And is not this what the Gospel tells us.

Think about that story
Fishing, storm, call on Jesus and bob's your uncle.
How do we call on Jesus

We listen to what he says, we interpret it in the light of our experience and situation, and we try our best, doing nothing that we don't want others to do to us.

In other words, we love our neighbours as ourselves.

And in so doing, we love God with all our heart, with all our souls, with all our mind and with all our strength.

The reading tells us we can be courageous . Call on Jesus and be bold.

No more hiding our light under a bushel – it is not ours to hide.

And let me have no false modesty about this. I help nobody by hiding my light in case it embarrasses others, and I certainly do not help myself. It is, in any case, not my light to hide.

'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.' *Marianne Williamson Return to Love*, p 165

'The incarnation', means that we are most holy when we are most fully human. Be BOLD.

I saw a good programme. Muslims, alcohol
Why do we criticise Muslims for
We should be doing it too.

We need courage.

It's through dealing with difficult experiences that we grow – tested in the refiner's fire. When we enfold our past, when we absorb and learn from our experiences, we can allow them to help us to help others: our pain and joy can help create a source of healing for others.

As Pope Benedict XVI says, we lose nothing by letting Christ into our lives

Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return.

Fling wide the gates. Sunday, 24 April 2005.

Proper 2, 2 before Lent, Sexagesima

WW Evensong

11 February 2007

Genesis 1:1-2:3 First creation story

Matthew 6:25-34 Don't worry. Lilies of the fields stuff

After all the excitement of Christmas we're now in what is ordinary time.

I like ordinary time. Reflection, catching up, growth.

So what can I take from these lessons? Well, I find it difficult.

- The two creation stories, how they differ, and what this tells us about our attitudes to scripture. EXPAND.
- I could preach a sermon about being anticonservationist. God made man in his image and gave us control over creation.
- I could preach a sermon about being conservationist. God made man in his image and gave us responsibility for creation. Avian flu.
- Does the earth have a life of its own? God, after all, created it. There is so much that we don't know.

What is explicit in all this is change and growth.

Process

Revelation goes on

Ps 104

And our lives are a process.

God named us – God has power over us.

To name things is to give power over them

I have called you by name, you are mine.

We are utterly dependent upon God.

But we do know that God created mankind in his image. This is startling actually,

In a way it gives approval to us to be authentically natural, authentically human.

Remind us of what we are made.

In all our relationships we should remember that we are made in God's image – and so is everyone else.

Gays. If you draw a line, J is on other side of it.

Some examples

- Victoria mothers not binding
- Middle class mothers smothering
- RCSI work colleagues feeling abused by people not respecting them

Jesus is the perfect reflection of God – wisdom terminology. And we are imperfect reflections of Jesus.

How do we call on Jesus

We listen to what he says, we interpret it in the light of our experience and situation, and we try our best, doing nothing that we don't want others to do to us.

In other words, we love our neighbours as ourselves.

And in so doing, we love God with all our heart, with all our souls, with all our mind and with all our strength.

So we just sit and wait for God to provide? No.

Thessalonians.

In second lesson, J does not deny reality of human needs. We have to use what we've been given. The second reading tells us not to fret. Essentials will be provided. So that we can get on with the divine work – which is, since we are made in God's image, human work.

And let's do it with passion and commitment.

David Hope.

Other Christian teachings tell us to be bold –

- Talents
- cast your nets on the other side
- this morning

Call on Jesus and be bold. No more hiding our light under a bushel – it is not ours to hide.

And let there be no false modesty about this. I help nobody by hiding my light in case it embarrasses others, and I certainly do not help myself. It is, in any case, not my light to hide.

'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.'

Marianne Williamson Return to Love

'The incarnation', means that we are most holy when we are most fully human. Be BOLD.

I saw a good programme. Muslims, alcohol

Why do we criticise Muslims for

We should be doing it too.

We need courage.

It's through dealing with difficult experiences that we grow – tested in the refiner's fire. When we enfold our past, when we absorb and learn from our experiences, we can allow them to help us to help others: our pain and joy can help create a source of healing for others.

As Pope Benedict XVI (2005) says, we lose nothing by letting Christ into our lives

Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return.

Fling wide the gates.

Let Christ in

Let our light out – and don't worry about wants. In second lesson, J does not deny reality of human needs.

Proper 3, Next before Lent, Quinquagesima

Transfiguration

WW HC, Bonsall HC, KI Evensong

18 February 2007

Exodus 34:29-35

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

Luke 9:28-36

Today I'm going to talk about faces. Gazing.
gentle wander with excursions.

And to get us in the right mood I'm going to start with that well known theologian, Nancy Mitford.
Love in a cold climate.

Cedric looked sulky, as he always did when I talked like this. 'More beautiful than one? He said.
'Very much like you, Cedric.' 'So you say, but I don't find that you gaze and gaze at *One*, on the
contrary, you listen intently, with your eye out of the window.'

* * * * *

Glory on a hilltop. Face shining. A hilltop with two companions Moses and Elijah, the law and the
prophets.

A few verses later in the gospel and we read of Jesus setting his face to go to Jerusalem – to the
crucifixion. Face again. Face, image, the principal organ of communication.

Now on a few pages this time, and we have the face of agony, Jesus on a different hill, with different
companions. A different kind of glory.

On today's hilltop we have the voice of God booming out his approval of Jesus. And at this point in
the gospel story, this is a good thing, indicating as it does divine approval for the events that follow
it in the gospel. Events that are unlikely, you would think, to be approved of by a loving father God.

You might think that the Transfiguration story is oddly placed here. It is more like a post
resurrection story in some respects, and earlier biblical scholars suggested that those who put
together the gospels got this in the wrong order. But it is so odd, it must be right. So what are we to
make of the transfiguration glory immediately followed by the journey to Jerusalem, and then the
action on the other hilltop.

Today's festival for us is followed by Lent. Lent separates these two glory days. And I suppose
today's festival is timely to cheer us up in February as we are about to enter into Lent. Because Lent
is gloom and self-denial. WRONG.

Today's festival is certainly cheering, but it has nothing to do with Lent being gloomy, because Lent
is not gloomy. George Herbert, more next week, described Lent as a feast, and so it is. It is a
festival of growth. Lent means lengthening, and it is in the lengthening days of spring that we grow.
It is fortunate that for us it happens in springtime, the growth season. (But then Christianity is a
religion of the northern hemisphere).

Lent gives us opportunity to **recall, reflect and renew ourselves**, and renewal always involves
some kind of growth.

In biology, renewal means shedding of something we no longer need. And that's the origin of giving
up something for Lent. If we give up something we like, self denial, only to gorge ourselves on it
later, then we are being rather silly. There's no point in making ourselves miserable.

I'm not giving up chocolate, or crisps, or anything else like that. And certainly not gin.

Lent abstinence approached this way is surely rather silly. If I really want to emulate Our Lord's
period in the desert, I will try to give up unwanted attitudes that tether me to old ways of thinking.
If you want to do something really productive – and we all, every one of us, need to do something
like this, I'd recommend that we all try to see ourselves as others see us. And then try to shed the
attitude or way of thinking or behaving that shocks us the most about what we have seen about
ourselves. If we imagine that there's nothing to get rid of, we deceive ourselves

That would lead to growth.

Shedding.

Discarding old skin, like a reptile. Or insect coming out of chrysalis, pupation, biological
metamorphoses.

Which takes me to Paul's letter. Metamorphosis is exactly the word he uses to describe that change of which we heard. The change that comes as we look on the mirror. Faces again. Jesus transformed approaches resurrection. We too can approach Christ as we cooperate with his will, as we align our will with that of the Master, as we work according to his teaching. Then we too will be changed from glory into glory. We will, like the caterpillar become the butterfly.

Imago – immature organism. Image. We are in the process of becoming. William Blake.

For me, this is salvation seen not in terms of Christ paying any debt, but as through following Christ we approach the divine, *deification*. Salvation that comes from our participation in the already deified humanity of Christ. This is the true goal of Christian life. This is what the *Transfiguration* is about, celebrating humanity glorified in Christ.

So I encourage you to look at the radiant face of the transfigured Christ that we have heard of today as an image of journey's end, the destination after all our sheddings, our metamorphoses.

Rather than concentrating, as the gloomier versions of Christianity so often do, on self denial and guilt and thinking about what we are saved **from**, we instead keep our eyes and intentions fixed on what we are saved **to**. Glory, radiance, joy.

Make the next six weeks an opportunity to clear out the rubbish in your soul that is clouding your vision. So when you look in Paul's mirror you will see not so much an image as if through a glass darkly, but an image of glory.

George Herbert can have the last word. 240

A man that looks on glass, on it may stay his eye, or if he pleaseth, through it pass, and then the heavens espy.

If he pleaseth – the road is open to all. All we have to do is to want to travel along it. Then we too will be transfigured.

Amen.

Candlemas 28.01.07

MP, Brassington and Middleton

Malachi 3:1-5
Hebrews 2:14-18
Luke 2:22-40

The endless search for something

Daughter
The world is longing for something
Proud of my children

- Lovely story
- Others there too
- Longing for redemption, salvation
- Simeon and Anna teach us that rather than search we should let it come to us.
- Be still. I am the least qualified person to be giving you this advice.
- And this was the message of Advent too.
- Simeon and Anna, recognised, accepted salvation
- That's all we have to do – accept salvation
- No need to work at it

Images

Bank manager - redeem
Judge – justify, atone
Sailors – save

Evangelicals often talk about being saved by the cross.
In truth, we are saved not by the cross, but by the one who died on the cross.

Here at the end of incarnation celebration

Without incarnation, no atonement

Salvation by the **incarnation** of logos is unsurpassable, Rahner says, for three reasons.

- what is communicated is God's own self;
- the mode of communication, human reality, is made divine;
- the recipient of the self-communication, Jesus himself, is one with God.
- Irenaeus, Rahner, incarnation divinizes humanity
- All This is *deification*, and salvation involves participation in the already deified humanity of Christ as the true goal of Christian life, accomplished through the Holy Spirit.
- We in him, and he in us

What is the key to salvation?

Childlikeness

The old man carried the child, but the child governed the old man.

The message of children, suffer, be like, cast off attachments.

Old ways enfolded not superseded

Courage to fight

fearlessness

The result of this salvation

- God became man and suffered all men's woes. We didn't ask him to. That is love.
- Through the incarnation, life and crucifixion of Jesus, God enters into all human experience: *God enters man*.
- Through the resurrection man is reborn – a constant cycle of death followed by resurrection: eternal regeneration, eternal Eucharist, eternal spiritual re-incarnation. *Man enters God*.
- We fall short, repent and accept forgiven – crucifixion immediately followed by resurrection. Perhaps this is salvation, when we give something back to God-incarnated-in-us.

Forgiveness, childlikeness, everyone

- Christ's forgiveness is salvation.
- Why is it so difficult to accept forgiveness and divine love? Are we afraid that by letting someone into our lives we are in some way diminished? 'Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return.'
- Difficult for people like me brought up in Protestantism
- Christianity teaches that when I accept the forgiveness offered in Christ, it does not affect me alone – it affects all those with whom I come in contact because it changes the way I relate to everyone and everything.
- We have to forgive to help save others.

All this transforms us – if we let it

Simeon was transformed and so can we be. And if we are transformed, so is everyone who comes into contact with us.

We are all saved – we just have to accept it.

Jesus is God, God is love,

One of the most moving stories of the salvific effect of love, with an incarnational effect on the recipient, is in

- Andersen's *The Snow Queen* where Gerda melts Kay's heart of ice with tears of joy and love.
- O my saviour lifted --- melt this heart of ice.
- And what more beautiful image of salvation through incarnational Eucharist than George Herbert's: *Love bade me welcome*.

Love bade me welcome (George Herbert)

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
 Guiltie of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lack'd anything.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here;
 Love said, You shall be he.
I, the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,
 I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
 My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, sayes Love, and taste my meat:
 So I did sit and eat.

Lord, help us to remember Simeon and Anna,

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe: to you be praise and glory for ever. For you are our light and our salvation, and we your children wait for your loving kindness in the midst of your temple. In your Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, there has spring up a light for the righteous and joyful gladness for those who are faithful. As we, like Simeon and Anna, welcome him with joy, presented before us as light of all the world, may we be filled with his spirit and made a living temple to the praise and glory of your holy name. And, as we join our prayers with theirs, grant that we might live in his light all the days of our life. **Amen.**

Epiphany 3

1 Corinthians 12, 12-20 and 26

Luke 4, 14-21

Unity

Behind every successful man, amazed mother in law, astonished school friends, jealous school friends

Returning home

A prophet never recognised

we change

Edenhall hotel and Susan Monkhouse

Langwathby chapel and me

Jesus has changed: Baptist, baptism, temptation

And so Luke builds up the drama of this moment, the scroll of Isaiah is unrolled in front of Jesus he finds the place, reads from it then all eyes are fixed on him. We can feel the tension, the expectation and then he speaks: Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

In the temple

Here we are in church:

Today the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing – the spirit of the Lord is upon you.

In our theology, we are Jesus

We are the body of Christ (later too)

The past is brought into the present so that we can work in the here and now to make the future a better place. And it needs it: woman who abused her child, the boys in Edlington.

The here and now is here and now. We often hear scripture read as if it was only about the past, But it is not. It is here and now. The liturgy is here and now: the greatest drama of all. We do well to translate it into our lives, into our circumstances, to recognize that Scripture is also about the unfolding of faith in our own lives.

These words of scripture are being fulfilled now and in us. Those we usually ignore throughout Mass until we are forced to shake their hand at the sign of peace, they too are the fulfilment of God's promise 'in your hearing'

By our baptism we can stand up and say
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me.
we are sent out as *Christs* into the world.

We are the ones who will be ridiculed for his name. We are the ones who will be threatened. But faith leads us to face up to the excitement that God is working in and through us. Let us find that excitement as we wait to listen to Christ. Let us find time and stillness to hear him speak to us. Let us embrace our liturgies and our prayer with joy as we see in ourselves the fulfilment of God's promise.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, he has anointed us.

Hungry, poor and imprisoned - US