

Christmas Day

A sermon preached by the Rector, the Very Reverend Tim Barker, at the parish church of St Andrew, Guernsey on Christmas Day, 25 December 2021

Readings: Titus 2 vv 11-14 and John 1 vv 1-14

Weary to the point of exhaustion. Worried about finding a place to be safe and warm. Living under a ruler who is so threatened and irrational that the only option is going into exile as refugees.

That is the experience of many people throughout the world this year. And it is the story of the Holy Family, of Mary and Joseph.

Even if our experience is not so difficult, many of us are feeling weary, uncertain and even a little frightened after nearly two years of living with the Covid-19 pandemic.

I was reminded recently of this exchange of conversation between Frodo and Gandalf in J R R Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*:

'I wish it need not have happened in my time,' said Frodo.

'So do I,' said Gandalf, 'and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.'

Looking back over the past 20 months, these words resonated loudly.

We did not expect the Covid-19 pandemic. Even when the news of problems in China emerged, and the first case of Covid-19 infection was discovered in the UK at the end of January 2020, we did not anticipate the way our lives would be changed. Nor did we imagine how our lives would be dominated by Covid-19 nearly two years later.

'I wish it need not have happened in my time.' But it has. Over the centuries, people have thought the same, as wars have begun, when plagues have swept across continents, and at times of drought and famine, such as the people of Afghanistan are facing this December.

An important dimension of the Christmas story, of God coming amongst us in Jesus, is that Jesus was born at a particular time and in a particular place. That event changed the course of human history in a way that few of us can fully appreciate. So much Western art, music and literature cannot be understood without knowledge of the Christian faith.

At the heart of Christmas is a promise of light shining in darkness. St John describes the wonder and mystery of Jesus' birth like this: 'What came into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.'

We who follow Jesus are invited to allow ourselves to be shaped and continually challenged by his life, death and resurrection, and to carry the message of hope, of light shining in darkness, which is at the heart of the Christmas story. That is both daunting and liberating.

Once again, we hear the familiar Christmas carols. As the words paint the picture of Bethlehem two thousand years ago, they do so in words that resonate. 'The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight'.

Christmas gives us hope, hope of light in darkness, the hope of a better future that we need so much, the hope that is the fuel of the human spirit. At Christmas, we are invited, people of all faiths and none, to put that hope to work in a world that needs it so much. That is the outworking of God's gift of Jesus at Christmas.

May God give us the grace and wisdom to discern what we do 'in this time that is given to us', and may God bless you and your families this Christmas time.