



Welcome to St Thomas', the parish church of the Cliffe as we celebrate The Nativity of Our Lord with a service of Holy Communion from the Book of Common Prayer.

The service is in the red booklet although this year, because of Covid restrictions we are not permitted to sing or chant. Therefore, there can be no hymns and the entire service will be said, although we are permitted to enjoy organ voluntaries.

Communion will be received in one-kind only, while standing at the chancel steps. Please follow the one-way system – up the central aisle and back down the side.

## SERMON

**W**ELL, amid these very strange days in which we live, we have journeyed through the lovely Advent season of expectation, to the birth of Christ at Christmas which we are now celebrating together here at St Thomas' and which is being celebrated by Christians and many the world-over. In a world that currently seems so uncertain we have before us today the wonderful account in St John's gospel of Jesus coming to us with peace.

St John's account is indeed arresting for it presents the God of eternity, from all times. Those commencing words 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' harks back to the account in Genesis. That is the focal point of St John, the reality that God is eternal. So 'the Word', logos, really was there in the very beginning. God is self-expressing and has revealed Himself as being there from all eternity and as a result 'all things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made'. That fact was echoed in our epistle reading from Hebrews this morning which spoke about 'by whom also he made the worlds' and 'In the

beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth..'

In that revelation God comes to reveal Himself to us in Jesus, born to Mary at Bethlehem and with those wonderful and beautiful words 'the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not'. The light of God coming to us is the true light as Jesus said 'I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life'. As the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament said 'The people that walketh in darkness have seen a great light..... upon them hath the light shined'. On that night at Bethlehem we can reflect on that bright star which led the shepherds to find the Christ child lying in the manger, that true divine light of the world. That divine light was God's revelation of Himself in the Life of the Word incarnate in Jesus.

Ahead of God coming to us in Jesus was John the Baptist heralding that coming as we saw in last week's gospel reading. He was that beacon whose who mission was to reflect that coming light into the world. Indeed our Advent Crown of candles has each week in Advent reflected upon that

coming – first the Patriarchs and the Old Testament Prophets who foretold, then John the Baptist who heralded, then Mary who her bore Christ and now at Christmas, the birth of Christ – Emmanuel, God come to be with us.

That divine light of God coming to us in Jesus born at Bethlehem, in the Word made flesh, is a revelation not only of God Himself but of His love for all His creation, for each and every one of us. For all who see, receive and believe are sons of God. As our collect today says ‘..Grant that we being regenerate and made thy children by adoption and grace...’ may we receive and reflect that love of God. In that glory Jesus, as God’s own Son, was full of grace and truth and we beheld His glory. God being love is self-expressed in Jesus coming to us, Emmanuel God with us. I recently came across a beautiful Ugandan prayer which is ‘Blessed are you, O Christ child, that your cradle was so low that shepherds could yet kneel beside you and look, level-eyed, into the face of God’.

So as we worship the birth of Jesus, God come to us, this Christmas may we all seek to be a reflector of the light of Christ in the darkness of our world at this current time, with all its sadness, uncertainty, distress and pain. May we, like all the pilgrim

saints before us, be beacons bearing witness to Christ’s birth, in 2021 to our world as we live our daily lives. For as Isaiah said ‘Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace’.

It is said that the most popular Christmas carol is ‘O Holy Night’, a great personal favourite of mine too. The words of that ring out a hope for our time ‘A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn..’

The light of God, in Jesus born and come amongst us, is always here with us no matter how dark our world, no matter how troubled our hearts. The thought that God is always with us is at times hard to comprehend, hard to embrace when we are struggling in life but maybe it will help to reflect on that simple but profound truth that yonder in the days ahead does break forth a new a glorious morn in Emmanuel, God with us. A simple thought, reflection and prayer to carry with us as we celebrate in the peace of Christmas now and in the days ahead. I wish each one of you and all whom you love a very peaceful and blessed Christmas. Amen. Fr Herbert.

#### **Forthcoming services:**

**Saturday 26<sup>th</sup>** – Eucharist  
at 9am for St Stephen.

**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup>** – Parish  
Communion for St John at  
9.45am.

**Monday 28<sup>th</sup>** – Eucharist  
at 9am for The Holy  
Innocents.

**Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup>** – Eucharist at  
9am for St Thomas Becket.

#### **DECORATION**

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to make the church look so wonderfully festive for our Christmas services.



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