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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : December 23rd, 2018
“The Fourth Sunday of Advent”

“I wish Christmas would hurry up and arrive” said a small child to me recently. I know exactly how he feels. For me, the sermons are written, the services are all ready – I am just waiting. So too in today’s readings, the stage is set, the timing is right – and the focus is about to shine out in the person of Jesus. Typically we find God delighting in using the ordinariness of good people so that extraordinary things can be accomplished. God allows individual people to know their own part in the action exactly as and when they need to know it.

Today, in the portion of Luke’s Gospel we hear the account of what happened before the birth as Mary (and in the background Joseph too) waited. As Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, we can only imagine the talk between them both as they waited together. There is often comfort to be had in being with someone who is going through what you are going through. But furthermore, it is Elizabeth who shares with Mary the extraordinary revelation that God’s blessing really is going to be upon her as she bears the Son of God.

So it is through the willing participation of Mary and Joseph, God is poised to come among his people as their Saviour – and that is, quite simply, all that we need to remember for now as we celebrate that it was this ready agreement by these two ordinary people that made Christmas possible.

John Betjeman helps us with his lovely poem ‘Christmas’ which ends: “And is it true? And is it true, this most tremendous tale of all, Seen in a stained-glass window's hue, a Baby in an ox's stall? The Maker of the stars and sea become a Child on earth for me? And is it true? For if it is no loving fingers tying strings around those tissued fripperies, the sweet and silly Christmas things, bath salts and inexpensive scent and hideous tie so kindly meant, 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”.

The day before Christmas Eve is a very good time for us to pause and reflect, looking back to the past as we look forward to the future, to Christmas and beyond into the coming New Year. Maybe we can ponder what have we learnt from this past year and what we are going to try to promise for the coming New Year? It may be something quite small and insignificant which we want to change in our lives. It may be something much bigger. But whatever it is we are resolved to do, we must always remember that, all together, we can make a huge difference by sharing a little bit of **love** and **hope** with others in our world – or at least in that small part of God’s world which we are privileged to inhabit today.

There are many things published in the papers and on the internet, giving us lots of good advice as we prepare to move from one year to the next. For me, I have always liked the Rule of Conduct which was penned by John Wesley way back in the 18th century but which I think has stood the test of time. It is a very simple rule of life which we might choose to adopt for the forthcoming New Year:

**Do all the good you can,
by all the means you can,
in all the ways you can,
in all the places you can,
at all the times you can,
to all the people you can,
as long as ever you can.**

In the Christmas story, we find God delighting in using the ordinariness of good people so that extraordinary things can be accomplished. And still today he continues to accomplish extraordinary things through ordinary people, through you and through me.

And for that truth both now at Christmas and in the New Year to come, thanks be to God.