

Revd Michael Burns  
Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : December 24th, 2018  
“Christmas Eve”

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**SERMON - MIDNIGHT MASS/CHRISTMAS DAY (8am) 2018**

Another year has flown by at breakneck speed and the world is becoming more challenging on all fronts. Consequently the Christmas message of “Peace on earth and good will to all’ not only needs to be sung out everywhere this Christmas, but implemented in our personal, local and national lives too. Let us pray that we can see some hope amidst the seemingly endless torrent of bad news stories across the world echoing the words of verse 3 of the carol “It came upon the midnight clear” which Edmund Spears wrote in 1849 in response to revolution in Europe and the United States war with Mexico:

**Yet with the woes of sin and strife  
The world has suffered long;  
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled  
Two thousand years of wrong;  
And man, at war with man, hears not  
The love song which they bring:  
Oh, hush your noise, ye men of strife,  
And hear the angels sing.**

Apt words for our own times! And yet despite the horrors we see around us, there is still beauty, love and compassion and many wonderful people who can sustain and

support us – and say a quiet thank you for them.

But of course the month of December has always been a frenetically busy month, a month which has short days and long nights: John Donne called December ‘the year’s midnight’. Yet, tonight, in the stillness and quietness, we have come to Church to worship, to give our worth to God as we celebrate his gift to our world. We may worship regularly, or occasionally or never before - but tonight we have all come through the darkness to gather together in the light, in the light of God’s gift to our world. For it is in the arrival of this baby that God provides an answer to darkness.

The experience of light in the midst of darkness is impossible to forget. Rembrandt captures it in his picture ‘The Adoration of the Shepherds’ where shadowy human figures are grouped on the edge of the picture in darkness with the only light seeming to come from the Christ child.

In this birth is God’s answer to darkness in the many and varied ways that human beings can experience it. For Christmas is about God lighting up the ordinary and giving those who never thought they would be deemed important, a sense of their own worth.

For a start, God chose an insignificant town, Bethlehem, to be the place where his Son, our Saviour, was to be born - and indeed in the whole Christmas story, we see God entrusting himself to humanity in very ordinary people - indeed, to you and to me, if we could but recognise it. The trouble is we don’t really believe it, partly because we feel that Christmas is primarily a time for the children and not for those of us who are adults and going on in years. But John Bell from the Iona Community in Scotland puts it like this:

‘There are lots of older people who are forgotten in the Christmas story but who

are crucial to it. There are Elizabeth and Zechariah the priest - there are Simeon and Anna, who when Christ is later taken to the Temple, realize that this is God incarnate. Indeed apart from Mary and Jesus, Joseph, the Wise Men, Herod, the Shepherds - all are older, up in years. Christmas is a time when God puts a new value and expectation on those who think they are past it. He expects those of us who are more senior in our years to be the midwives of the new thing that God wants us to do and to be through the birth of his Son into our dark and distracted world.'

The Gospel of John puts it well 'in him was life, and that life was the light of all'.

This is Rembrandt's starting point and a thought to carry with us in this month of the year's midnight.

One final thought - don't forget the one person crucial to the Christmas story who is all but invisible - the innkeeper - though many artists do depict him as being present also. He was there because he felt sorry for someone in difficulty and tried to do something to help. He did not just feel sorry - he did something about it.

Christmas is a time when God puts a value on adults who have got stuck and expects them, wills them, to do something different, to be someone different. May that challenge give us all food for thought and food for action in all of our futures?