

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : December 27th, 2020
“First Sunday of Christmas”

27 DECEMBER 2020 – CHRISTMAS 1

Right from the start, Jesus is something of a revolutionary. Born to bring God’s saving power, Mary gives birth to him on the straw of a stable, far from home and family support. Those who came hot-footing it along the streets in the middle of the night were neither neighbours nor religious leaders – but shepherds. Shepherds!

Now at the time of Jesus birth, shepherding was not the romantic profession it is often presumed to be. It meant staying awake at night to ward off wolves and thieves. Indeed, shepherds were considered unclean and unrighteous, because of the nature of their job. It also meant not being able to attend religious services because the sheep couldn’t be left – so it was revolutionary that the first people to hear of God’s great gift were those who were not often likely to be in Church. Yet it was to them that Luke reports the angels coming, a sign that this Saviour is linked both with David – who was a shepherd boy turned king – and also with the marginalised and the powerless.

Yet the image of Jesus as the Shepherd is a long-standing and familiar one – and it doesn’t just end with Jesus. Down the centuries, the image of the shepherd has long been linked to those in the Church who try to offer a ministry of pastoral care and support. But those who do so do not act alone. When a priest is installed by a bishop into a parish, the bishop uses these

words to the new priest – “Receive the cure of souls which is both yours and mine”. In other words, such care – such cure of souls, as it is called – is shared, bishop and priest seeking to work together. The wise priest will then also seek to work together with his churchwardens, with his church council, with his congregation, with the people of the whole parish. It is a direct parallel to the way that shepherds work – ideally, there really needs to be more than one shepherd – or at the very least a sheepdog – helping to look after the sheep, particularly if it is a large and perhaps unruly flock.

Today, December 27th, we particularly remember St John, the beloved Apostle and Evangelist – whose remarkable Fourth Gospel closes each Carol Service, as at the very start of his writing he unfolds the Mystery of the Word. The end of his Gospel reads “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written”. John was a beloved disciple of Jesus, the one who is referred to in chapter 19. Jesus, on the cross, sees his mother and John standing near each other. Jesus said to his mother ‘Dear woman, here is your son’ and to the disciples ‘Here is your mother’. From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

So, as families and friends try to be in touch with each other at Christmas, the Sunday after Christmas is devoted to recalling the family at Nazareth – Jesus, Mary and Joseph – and John. It should remind us how important it is to appreciate what our families and close friends give us – remembering too that, for many, this Church, this congregation is their family – and for this we give thanks to God. One member of this Church, who lives alone, wrote in a card “thanks be to God for making Christ Church such a happy family Church”. Let us today try to value each other as the special family of God in this place – and may God bless us all until we meet again next year. Amen