

Christmas Homily (2017) from the Bishop of Lancaster



Each Christmastime we come together to remember and celebrate once more the birth of Jesus Christ. We are so familiar with the story and its details: Mary and Joseph finding no room at the inn, having to make do with a manger where the child was born, the shepherds in the nearby fields, the angels singing God's glory and proclaiming peace on earth, the amazement of the shepherds when they saw the newborn child. Then the coming of the Magi, those wise men and students of the stars from the East, the threat posed by the jealous King Herod, and the ensuing flight into Egypt. We know all this, and yet it is as if each year we are hearing the wonder of it for the first time.

And the awesome wonder of Christmas is that the Son of God has come into our world that night long ago, in humble surroundings in Bethlehem. His name was and is Emmanuel, God-with-us. This infant has, so to speak, dual identity: he is the Son of Mary as well as God's own Son. The Christmas story is the beginning of our redemption, for this child would grow to manhood and tell the world of the Father's love. He would be a friend to all, especially to the sick, the oppressed and the downcast. He would forgive sinners and restore them to God's friendship, and would preach the way of love. In the end it was because of that message of love that, as the liturgy says, he stretched out his arms on the cross to embrace the world.

The angel calmed the startled shepherds with the words, *"Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord."* And that news of great joy still holds for us, for a saviour has been born for us. Nothing can take that from us. It is our unshakeable rock in the storms of life, whether times are good for us or when the tide is running against us. The birth of Jesus is God's truth and can never be contradicted. A great light has come into our world and no alien or hostile power will extinguish it. As the Evangelist John remarks, *"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness could not overpower it."*

We know from our own experience that joy comes and goes, and with the light there always seem to be shadows. We all want peace, but how fragile it can be! But the message from heaven, from God, this night/day is one of peace and joy which do not come and go, for the Prince of Peace has been born and that is the real joy of Christmas.

May something of that peace and joy fill our hearts and the hearts of those we love this Christmas-tide. Amen!

+Michael G Campbell OSA
Bishop of Lancaster

25 December 2017