

## **Transcript for Christmas Day sermon - online**

For some of us this Christmas may be very different to other years. None of us have ever celebrated Christmas in a pandemic that's for sure. Family gatherings may well be smaller and like you have today, your Christmas service is taking place online rather than in one of our churches! But wherever and whenever you are tuning in, Christmas as always is a time to care for one another and to be together if we can, however that may work this year.

The birth of Christ took place in an unusual way as well and wasn't as his parents would have planned. It must have been so worrying to have arrived at Bethlehem when the little town was so busy and Mary about to give birth. It must have been stressful too for the innkeeper who wasn't able to offer his usual hospitality to this needy couple but he offered what he could which was as tradition tells us a stable, or a cave where the animals were lodged overnight so that the child could be born under shelter at least. It wasn't what anyone would have chosen.

It's a bit like we have all been coping with isn't it. Everything has to be thought out, then perhaps rethought out again and again! That's how it has felt for us at church this year as things have changed and changed again. No singing inside church but you can sing outside now! You can have coffee or a meal in a cafe or pub but we can't serve coffee at the end of a service. We got round that for Cafe Church though! A table outside with coffee and croissants handed to you to take and eat socially distanced in your pew.

We have all had to be creative and worship in different ways, meet in different ways, outside or on Zoom. Churches may have been completely closed in the first long lockdown but actually there was an opportunity to have a church in every home as we all learned how to grapple with online services or worship materials delivered to our door! It may not have been or be what we want it to be but it was something.

The stable 2000 years ago may not have been the nice guest room which the inn keeper or the holy family wished it was but the Christ child arrived safely.... And as for what happened next as visitors started to arrive....

It had all started out as just another night on the Bethlehem hillside for some shepherds with their sheep. The last thing they were expecting was a visit from one angel never mind the sudden appearance of a heavenly host! Shepherds, very very ordinary people, regarded by others generally as outcasts - visited by angels and given this important message. And what was the message? That a child is 'being born for you today'. In other words it's happening right now - today! And not just for them if that wasn't

incredible enough but the angel tells them this message is for everyone in the whole world. What good news is that?!

Terrified and surprised in equal measures they feel compelled to leave their sheep which wasn't ideal at all and go into the town to find this baby who was to be the Saviour of all. It certainly wasn't what Mary and Joseph were expecting - shepherds visiting and telling them how the birth of their baby had been proclaimed to them by hosts of angels! The shepherds who were in fact the third of God's messengers to bring news to Mary, like the angel and her cousin Elizabeth before them, reveal to Mary what God has promised. (Its strange but true that in God's workings with us that he often will present the truth of his message in several ways and through several witnesses, just to make sure we get the message!)

The shepherds leave the holy family changed by what they had witnessed and as they returned to their fields and their flocks they witnessed to others all they had seen and been told, as they glorified and praised God. As for Mary, what were her thoughts at all that she had been told? Amazed of course and we are told she treasured all of these words and pondered them in her heart. As yet she had not been told just how this child would save the world. It was not yet time...

So, as we reflect on this past year, a year when our lives have changed so much, we hold in our thoughts all those who have died, those who have lost their jobs, and we are so thankful for those who have cared for the sick and vulnerable during this pandemic. We are thankful too that we have come through this time of fear and uncertainty and we pray that with the amazing progress with vaccines and treatment 2021 will be a better year for everyone.

What has not changed though is the story and meaning of Jesus' birth. Have a very happy Christmas even if it's not as it usually is - the important things never change. Jesus is born for YOU today. Emmanuel - God is with us. With us in the mess as in the good, in the disappointment and the difficulty, in sorrow and in joy. Happy Christmas and may your hopes and prayers be fulfilled as we enter over the threshold into a new year!