**Sunday 26th Dec – The beginning of something**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCqhX89WV_0> when a child is born

Welcome!

How are you all? Not too ‘morning-after-the-night-before-ish’?

Family news - There is nothing going on this week!

Open in prayer

555 Thou didst leave thy throne

Reading: John 1:1-14 – words from NIV, reading from the message

1419 Light of the world

Prayers

1194 Born in the night

How was Christmas? Or should I say how **is** Christmas? It’s a weird one, isn’t it? Are we still celebrating, or is it over now?

It always amazes me that the radio stations start playing Christmas music in November, and then on Boxing Day or the day after it all stops. That’s it, over with, time to move on. I guess the DJ’s are sick of it by that time! But it feels wrong, doesn’t it? Well it does to me, at least.

I’m not saying I love Christmas music. Or the decorations – I think this time last year I was preparing to take them down, too! But the world seems to forget one thing about Christmas. We get used to all the buildup to ‘the big day’ and the excitement of the day itself, then in the days following feeling somewhat flat, deflated. All that stress, for nothing – it’s all over.

For Mary and Joseph, I wonder if it felt the same. The planning and stress of the long journey, the pain and mess and fear of childbirth, the excitement of the visit from the shepherds – and the next morning they are sitting, alone – it’s all over.

Only it isn’t, is it? Of course not! The shepherds may have gone back to their sheep, with just memories of an amazing night. The childbirth has been got through, and cleaned up. Food has been eaten, sleep has been had. But as Mary and Joseph look around they know it is not over. Because in front of them is a tiny baby.

The birth of a child is not an end – it’s a beginning. At least, it’s a beginning for anyone involved with that child.

For anyone not involved, the outsider looking in, the excitement of the birth is as good as it gets – yay, the child has been born! Congratulations! But soon friends find we can’t do the things we used to do, we don’t have the time or energy we used to have, we have new responsibilities. Sometimes as parents we lose people at that point – suddenly our life revolves around this new wonder that others are still on the outside of. Our life has changed, theirs has not – and if they are on the outside, they go off on a different path. The shepherds go back to their sheep, and never see Mary, Joseph - or Jesus – again.

But others are not content to stay on the outside. They recognise that although the excitement of the birth is over, the excitement of life has just begun. There are people in my life whose relationship has deepened **because** of the birth of my children – who **wanted** to be involved. I think of my neighbours, who we were quite friendly with, but the real beginning of our friendship was when Alison said I could call her if I needed – and I did, regularly! “Alison, they’re crying and I can’t stop them!” and she would be straight over. It was the **beginning**, for her as well as for me.

A beginning for Mary and Joseph, too. The end of hard journeys and childbirth, but the beginning of sleepless nights and dirty nappies (if they had nappies in those days!). Of tears and tantrums, some of which no doubt were from Jesus! The beginning of their family! The beginning of a lifetime of devotion to this child, first in physical care and education, then in pride and concern for him as he grew, until **Mary** would be the one to follow **him**.

Let’s pause there for a moment as we sing again:

1239 From the squalor of a borrowed stable.

We return to our reading this morning.

And it starts at the beginning. “In the beginning was the Word.”

John is clearly talking about the beginning of the world, linking Jesus back to creation, the eternal nature of God the Son; we need to remember that. But I want to ask something more. Is that the **only** way of reading this passage?

Yes, in the beginning of time was the Word of God, making and creating and giving life. But in the beginning of the gospel was also the Word of God, coming into the world as a human baby – what began at Christmas was a new revelation of the Word incarnate. A Word that brought light and life to the world. John says, “In him was life, and that life was the light of men.”

“In him was life.” Not just “He was alive,” but “He was the source of life to others.” He was the one you would go to to find life. As though he was so full of ‘life-force’ that it could be shared around. I can imagine, to maybe use a modern analogy, a person whose blood contains antibodies against a certain disease. And in the blood of that person, those who suffer from that disease can find hope for life – if that person will share it. In this person is life. And of course, the blood of Jesus has significant connotations for us. But I just want you to get the sense of Jesus as the source and hope of life for those in despair.

“And that life was the light of men.” The light that shines in the darkness. An image of revelation, an image of hope, an image of guidance, an image of exposure – “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” John says later on. An image of goodness against the dark sin of the world. Those who came to Jesus for life found light for their own lives.

In the beginning of time was the Word. In the beginning of the gospel was the Word. In the beginning of the Church was the Word. Jesus said, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.” (John 14:16-17a) The Holy Spirit, sent by the Word of God at Pentecost, began the life of the Church. A life which would also shine in the darkness, giving light to the world.

And in the beginning of our Christian life, was the Word. In more senses than one. The Word of God speaks to us, calling us to himself. Words, about God and from God, giving revelation of the love of God. The Word of God as we see made flesh in Jesus shows his glory; in him we **see** God. And in him we receive life, we are “given the right to become children of God.”

In Jesus, when we turn to him in faith, we find life. Jesus said, the night before he died, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” (John 14:23) and “I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” (John 14:20). If Jesus is the one who holds life, then it stands to reason that we who hold the one who holds life, hold life! Just like the sick person who receives the blood transfusion from the one with antibodies, Jesus’ life-giving blood now runs in our veins. Jesus’ light is a light within us; a light we are to continue to shine in the darkness.

The birth of Jesus is not the end of a story of pregnancy – it is the beginning of a story of life. The birth of Jesus in our hearts is not the end of a story of evangelism or seeking – it is the beginning of a story of life growing, taking shape, showing light in our lives. It is the beginning of our own childhood in God.

In that beginning was the Word. The Word that was with God, and was God; the Word that created us physically, was the source of our life spiritually. He shone his light in our darkness, and when we welcomed him in, made us God’s children. Once, the Word, the Son of God walked on this earth in flesh and blood, showing God’s glory, God’s grace and his truth. Today that Word that was there in our beginnings lives within us, bringing light and life to us and to those whom we meet. We share him in our actions, our words, our love for those around us. And so his light continues to shine in the darkness.

May that knowledge give us hope. That the light shines in the darkness even now, even though the darkness often does not understand it; even though those who need Jesus do not recognise him or receive him – the glory, grace and truth of God is seen in us. May it encourage us as we grow from childhood to maturity in him, as we shine our light and share him with others. May it bless us this Christmas as we remember that the light’s coming into the world, and into our lives, is not the end of the story but just its beginning – there is a long way to go, and some roads may be hard, but we have the life of Christ living within us, the Spirit alongside us, the Father watching over us. Jesus said “We will come and make our home with you”.

Let us pray.

Father, thank you for sending your Son into the world that we might have life. Thank you that Christmas was a beginning and not an end; that your coming into our lives is just the start of a journey with you. As we receive that life and light from you may we grow to maturity, and we too be lights in the darkness and declare your glory. In Jesus’ name.

891 Like a candle flame

May the life of God sustain you, the light of God guide you and give you hope. May God bless you and keep you, today and always. Amen.