

## Advent 4

**Sunday 18th December 2022**

We are fast approaching Christmas now and the birth of Jesus .But are we ready? I don't mean our plans, or the houses decorated up or the food prepared, or presents wrapped but are we truly ready to open up our hearts and let the Christ child in?

I find it hard that the last few Advent readings have seemed to be a bit of doom and gloom, not really getting us ready for the birth of Jesus, but then his birth happened over 2,000 years ago and for us now we should be preparing ourselves for his second coming.

But as we really don't know when that time or day will be, or where it might take place, or how he will arrive back here on earth, then how can we be ready?

So instead we are celebrating the day that God sent his son to earth in his love for us, this baby born to a virgin, laid in a manger .We don't really hear much about Joseph except he was a good man and a carpenter, who when he realised Mary was pregnant he didn't want to publicly shame her, as he knew the child could not be his, so planned to quietly divorce her .But God knew what he was doing and came to Joseph in a dream telling him the child Mary was carrying was the Christ child conceived by the Holy Spirit and was Israel's longed for saviour, so Joseph obeyed without question .Joseph and Mary what a team! They accepted the miraculous nature of her pregnancy and both of them were willing to trust in God and obey his commands .God had chosen Joseph for the most important job of raising Jesus and Joseph rose to the occasion and has become one of the most celebrated stepfathers of all time .It's sometimes hard to distinguish Joseph from the shepherds in the Nativity, which is integral to Jesus being known as the son of a carpenter, he is raised as just another child living in the town of Nazareth .

I might have done the usual things to be ready for Christmas .I am hoping that as I got on with the preparations for my Christmas, I took time to also soak up what it all does mean, for myself that was my part in the Journey to the Stable.

The Journey to the Stable was a real eye opener, learning that for some children it's the first time they had stepped inside a church and to hear the story of the nativity filled them with awe, but also filled myself with awe, to know that I might be a very small part of what hopefully will be their continuing Christian journey .

I have been as charitable as I can afford, not easy with the high cost of living and pending fuel bills.

The appearance of the Angel to the shepherds is more important than we take in .Shepherds were people looked down upon in Bethlehem society, people didn't exactly like them, yet here was the Angel appearing to them telling them to go find this baby, as the message was clear, that Hope had been born into this world in the form of baby Jesus and it was for everyone and for the good will for all men .

God bringing forgiveness to all, God and sinners reconciled, we are all human and we are all brought to birth in the same way Jesus was .God can perform the impossible, Elizabeth getting

pregnant in her old age, and at the other end of the age scale Mary the virgin conceived in holiness.

God had honoured Elizabeth's faithfulness to him and Mary whose trust never wavered and said yes to God.

Yet both seemed impossible, but they happened already showing that God just needs us to respond to his call and trust in him.

I don't suppose for one minute that Mary would think that she would be giving birth in a smelly stable and laying her first born in a manger, yet that is exactly what happened. God had chosen for his son to come amongst the poorest of people silently, no big fanfare announcement or a posh room in a hotel, but merely a stable. Mary must have been taking all these things in and wondering what it all meant especially when the shepherds rush in and later the wise men. Jesus literally was born into this world with nothing.

Faith, family and solidarity seems to stand out more at Christmas than any other time of the year. The fact is, Jesus came to us in humble surroundings, and we need to humble ourselves too, to meet him in the Eucharistic feast .

Christmas is the time we experience the humility of Christ's Birth of love unfolding around us.

So here I am feeling the Joy around me, also the sadness that comes through learning of the death of someone known personally to us, or of a friend who has been bereaved and this week we have all been saddened by the deaths of the children at Babbs Mill Lake in Kingshurst. What the Bible doesn't tell us is of the events like these that also must of been happening during this time also, except for the jealousy of Herod having all the baby boys killed. So let us remember that for some people this can be a period of extreme emotions of highs and lows.

I have been spending a bit more time in thinking about what the real message of Christmas is, which is the ultimate gift of Jesus the Christ Child, the peace and hope and perfect love given all those 2,000 years ago in very different circumstances of today,

I don't think we can ever replicate the Joy of the shepherds or the need of the Wise Men to go and follow this brand new star in the sky and the gifts thoughtfully given to the baby Jesus as they knew he was a true king.

But have I opened my heart up to Jesus?

It's a question that keeps popping into my mind when I think of Jesus's humble beginnings and that of Joseph and Mary and all the shepherds and Wise Men, who all followed the words and signs of God.

So I am asking Jesus right now, to come into my life this Christmas, let him be to me the present I need, I want and must have. Maybe by opening up my heart now it will go some way into the future of preparing myself for his second coming, whenever that might be.

Will you also open up your hearts and let him in? I am going to say a prayer now and if you wish to make it your prayer, also join me in saying Amen.

let us pray;

I invite you Jesus into my Heart to be my personal lord and saviour. Please forgive me my sins right now as I turn to you and make you lord of my life at this Christmas time and for ever more, Amen

So all it leaves me to say now is have a happy time, and I pray that God's blessings be upon you and with you all in 2023.

Thanks be to God .