

Christmas Day 2018 - Isaiah 9.2-7: Luke 2.1-14,(15-20); Psalm 96

Hands up all those who has had a visit from Father Christmas ?? New gits are like treasures, aren't they - new gadgets - new bikes - new clothes and make-up - some new money - or tokens - new, new, new!

These are new treasures for sure - well, for now at any rate...
Some might become lasting treasures - some will wear and fade...

We hear in the reading today how Mary 'treasured' the visit of the shepherds who came and told Mary of the glorious throng of angels heralding in such wondrous good news of great joy FOR ALL PEOPLE - Mary treasured the words - the wonder and glory of knowing that her son was the Messiah - the anointed one..

What treasures do you want to gather - and collect - and remember from today?

Do you want to remember and treasure the moment you saw your new bike - or clothes - or make-up - or gadget - or do you want to remember and treasure - the fact that today you will spend time together - that you have warm memories of dear Christmases past - if the one today is less than happy and jolly for whatever reason -

... Do you want to remember and treasure some good news you once received - or that somewhere in the darkness of the brokenness of the world - something has broken through and has shone a light into the dark and revealed the greatest treasure of all - the treasure of hopeful and faithful love – that comes from ordinary people being caught up in that extraordinary nativity story all those years ago. It is thought that the first person to make a nativity scene was St Francis of Assisi in 1223. After a pilgrimage to Bethlehem, he told a friend he wanted to show people the simplicity and poverty into which the Christ child came. He made a scene, complete with ox and ass in a cave outside Greccio for midnight mass on Christmas Eve.

The nativity story tell us that treasure can be found even in the midst of what seems to be anything but memorable and precious times...

*We heard Isaiah's words - some of the most famous in the Bible - not least because they are words echoed every Christmas in that great piece of music - Handel's Messiah -
'For a child has been born to us, a son given to us...and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' (v.6).*

Mighty and majestic words - but we should remember that Isaiah wrote these words in the middle of Judah's eighth century BC war with Syria and the northern Jewish kingdom of Israel.

For Isaiah, the threat of loss and exile was all around. And yet, through him, God speaks words of hope and deliverance – hope that a new King - even greater than David - would appear to heal the divisions between Judah and Israel, and uphold a kingdom 'with justice and with righteousness' (v.7).

It must have been hard to Isaiah to remain hopeful as everything around him was falling apart - even today it can feel impossible to hold fast to a loving God and his faithfulness to us in today's world - but Isaiah held his nerve - and faith - and look what happened - the birth of Jesus - in humble and lowly surroundings, visited by humble and lowly shepherds - in a troubled and turbulent time - the wonderful counsellor appeared.

Mary - the mother of the baby – was young and away from home - was able to hold firm in her faith and treasure the fact that she was holding Emmanuel - 'God with us' – and offered him to the world - a scary world - but resting and holding tight the treasure of such a gift – of hope and trust.

The message of today – Christmas 2018 - is hope and trust...

But not just any hope - like we hope that our perfume doesn't run out too quickly - or that the batteries don't go flat too quickly on our new gadget - or our hope that the most awkward of family member doesn't misbehave across the dining table - but rather a hope that has God at the centre - the faithful hope of Isaiah that becomes the sure and certain hope born in our hearts today through this holy birth. God himself - coming to us a Prince of Peace - born to be King. Jesus - name above all names - Emmanuel - God with us

The greatest treasure of all - and one that will never date, never fade and never wear out - ...

So this Christmas Day - enjoy the fun and festivities that we have come to know and expect - but remember that at the heart of it all lies the hope of an everlasting life and love - that is promised no matter what is going on today - no matter how easy or difficult things are - and no matter how smart or rubbish our baubles and gadgets of this material world function – the light of the world is coming among us - wrapped in swaddling bands and lying in a messy, unsafe, ordinary manger – prepared to enter into our messy, unsafe, ordinary life..

Here's a thought - we might be thinking that we are welcoming Jesus into the world today – into a world of festivities and baubles and gifts - but actually, it is Jesus welcoming us into his world this day – into his world of love, joy, peace, kindness, healing, wholeness.

God's love for us through the birth of Jesus is breaking through the frailties of the world and our own lives to show us that beneath the turkey and tinsel and all that lovely stuff is the most precious gift of all – the gift of love. May love be your most precious gift this Christmas – and always....

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