

## John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome<sup>[a]</sup> it.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

<sup>9</sup> The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— <sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

There is a danger in our multinational, multi-ethnic, religiously open world that Christmas can get quite 'safe'. Anodyne, if you like. Christmas cards portray a robin on a sprig of holly, or a snowman, or a Christmas tree — images that evoke the season without any connotation of faith at all. But it doesn't stop there — we can swap Jesus for Father Christmas, who evokes generosity and joy, but not the challenges present in the image of the God-child laid in a food trough. Christmas is for the children, I am told, and perhaps as a consequence it becomes a U rated story, accessible to all. We don't want to think about the reality too much.

It is here that the edgy side of Christmas finds its place. Quite some years ago there was the banned advert for Mr Kipling mince pies — possibly irreverent but very funny. And the more recent slogans that here, at Christmas we find the real 'stable genius', that the manger was in fact a 'king-size bed'. And here, too, that we find the powerful image produced by the Lutheran church in Bethlehem of a baby Jesus, wrapped in a clearly Palestinian scarf, laid amidst rubble, for their nativity scene — a reminder, lest we forget — that the Holy Land is a war zone.

I mentioned that we often make Christmas safe. A 'safe' Christmas still has power to speak, to disrupt the narrative of human desire, power and control. For example: the golden era of comic books came during the forties and early fifties as the world wrestled with the legacy of the second world war. It still helped kids and adults process the problem of evil, and to hope against ultimate destruction. So this 'fairy-tale Christmas', if we put it that way, is not all bad — it gives us as much of God's presence on earth as many can cope with.

That said, we know there was a more brutal reality to the world Jesus was born into. Mary would have been badly treated for having a child before marriage, despite her protests that he was a gift of God. Israel was not much of a nation — it had been a suzerain to powerful nations for 700 years. There had been rebellions in that time, and more would come — all put down violently. The demands for a census meant chaos for everyone, and in that chaos a

woman went into labour in a strange place, among the animals, because there was no space elsewhere. No one, apparently gave up their accommodation to help her. Magi brought very rich presents to honour the infant king — but also prompted Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus to flee to Egypt, giving them refugee status. They were migrants just as much as anyone who washes up on Britain's shores.

John's gospel has this wonderful line — the word became flesh and dwelt among us. That is quite a free translation. John says he 'camped with us', or pitched his tent with us.

It's a clever line, implying several things. Firstly to Jews with their ears open, John suggests the image of the tabernacle, the tent of God that Moses constructed in the Sinai during the exodus. He suggests that Jesus came as the new centre of our worship of God, the new place where we can meet with God, indeed that he came to replace both the tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple that succeeded it.

He also implies the sense of impermanence. Jesus was a short time on the earth and came with a purpose. He needed only temporary accommodation.

People in tents are usually on the move. Jesus is a travelling companion with us on our pilgrimage, indeed he is our leader. Tents afford little privacy — camping is a very shared experience. Jesus camped with us to be known and to love us, to be there in the midst of everything with us — sharing in all that it means to be human.

And so, finally, when John tells us that the word became flesh and camped with us, he tells us that Jesus received no more luxury or dignity than anyone else. He was born in a stable, his first foreign travel was as a refugee from Herod's infanticide, his throne was a cross, his crown was of thorns, his tomb — also temporary accommodation — was borrowed.

That Jesus took on poverty, fled as a refugee, lived under the power of the Romans, and was crucified in a cruel miscarriage of justice *matters*. I wish you a very happy Christmas, and the most peaceful of New Years, but I pray too that we might find what ways we can to pray for and support the victims of war in all their guises — and that we might all live in hope, because Jesus chose to embrace, to 'camp with', those in the very worst need, so that this world might be transformed by his coming.

Amen. SDG.

**We wish you Christmas blessings  
from all at St Peter's Westleton**



Our Benefice services are at St James Dunwich on December 31<sup>st</sup> and at St Peter's Theberton 7<sup>th</sup> January both at 10am

Our next service in Westleton will be Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> January at 3.30pm