

## **A New Word for a New Year**

Readings: Eph. 1:3-14 & John 1:1-18

Well, Christmas has come and gone again for another year. In three days all the decorations are traditionally taken down: real trees once uprooted from the forests of our land are discarded as useless; baubles and tinsel and stars and angels are packed up carefully so they can be re-used next time; Christmas cards, even though they are fewer in number these days, are removed from their hangings, noted, and binned; some people slowly return to work whilst others enjoy summer holidays whilst even more people return to their lonely existences.

The big question, though, is whether or not we have packed up Jesus in a box only to be remembered and displayed in 12 more months! As Christians we would be, we ought to be affronted by such a suggestion but let us take it on board and think through some of the issues. For to my way of thinking the coming of Christ offers us a new Word for a New Year.

It is at this time we celebrate Jesus who took on flesh and blood, entering our human condition in order to redeem it, to redeem us. Next year in 2017 will be the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the acknowledged start of the Reformation when Martin Luther nailed his 95 concerns or theses to the door of the Church in Wittenberg in Germany. The same reformer wrote this about Jesus:

*'Jesus... ate, drank, slept, walked: was weary, sorrowful, rejoicing; he wept and he laughed; he knew hunger and thirst and sweat; he talked, he toiled, he prayed ... so that there was no difference between him and other men, save only this, that he was God and had no sin.'*

The posh word, the theological word for this is incarnation and we would do well to remember it. Of all the Gospel writers who thought deeply about this, St John springs to mind. St John considered this stupendous event spiritually, theologically and from him we have learnt so much. For how can we go past Christmas without his great prologue in John 1, the reading we heard not many minutes ago?

*'In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God.'*

And again:

*'And the word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.'*

St John gives us the clue that in the birth of Jesus, the Word of God incarnate, creation is renewed and hope is re-born. Just consider how similar his opening words are to the first words in the book of Genesis:

*'In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ... and so forth ...'*

*In the beginning was the Word ... and so forth ...'*

Creation came into being not through two massive hands of God but by his word and that Word was Jesus, the agent of creation. It was the greatest act of love the creation has ever known and through it we too are created in God's image. Just as the baby in the manger bore the imprint of God's love, we too live by that same love and are commissioned to share that love wherever we can.

So, what then is the new word for the New Year?

2015 was for some a bad year. There was much needless suffering and pain. Witness the flooding that is happening all over the globe at the present time and you can see just how much the creation is in trouble. That reminds me of some words of St Paul in Romans 8:

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved.*

And that is the first word for the New Year. We may be faced with natural disasters, not God-given but natural disasters, note, but as children of God we should cling to hope not empty, vacuous hope, but hope based on the eternal promises of God and epitomised in Jesus.

We should also be ready to help those in need because we are but members of the same human family, those for whom God sent Jesus into the world. You may not feel you are rich but compared to the masses of disaffected people trudging between state after state to find a home, to live in peace, we are billionaires. Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus were just such a family when they trudged the arid road between Bethlehem and Egypt to find sanctuary and safety from the evil of King Herod. In their name, for their sake, let us help the present day holy families who are stateless and homeless. That is a second word.

I could go on but I will end with one final word for the New Year. The Church of Christ continues to haemorrhage members in our Western societies and it hurts. In our natural life to lose blood uncontrollably, to haemorrhage, is a precursor to death unless there is an

intervention. If we continue to lose members at the rate we are then the death of the Church as we know it cannot be avoided. But hold on, did not Jesus say to St Peter:

*'... on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.'*

Where is our faith? Where is the hope of which we so glibly speak? The incarnate Lord, the babe of Bethlehem who grew up to be our Saviour, has issued the rallying call but the Church chooses to be deaf to his words. We shall not, we cannot fail because Jesus is the head of the Church and he died for our redemption. Let us abandon clever sounding schemes and strategies and get back to the words of the Saviour, and listen once again to the Word made flesh. His is the only strategy for success and his strategy is LOVE.

I must stop there but think it through. There is hope because there is JESUS, and we love him with all our hearts.

Have the best of New Year's with Jesus. Amen.