

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

John 1.13



Limestone carving of the Incarnation outside St. Martin’s in the Fields,
London

Photograph: Archbishop Anne August 2024

“Trinitarian theology asserts that God’s love for His creation is not the love that is born of ‘emptiness’....

It is a love that overflows from fullness.”

(W.H. Vanstone in ‘Love’s Endeavour, Love’s Expense’)

A Christmas Message from Archbishop Anne

2024

Christmas is best seen and best experienced through the eyes of a child. There is a sense of wonder and delight in watching a child be totally captivated by the magic of it all. From twinkling Christmas lights and festive decorations on the Christmas tree, to the magic of Santa and his sleigh, the gifts wrapped in brightly coloured paper under the tree, these are 'wonder-filled' moments for children, and if we're honest for adults too.

If mystery surrounds our secular activities at Christmastime, how much more mysterious are the events surrounding the birth of the timeless Son of God, *Emmanuel*.

The story of the Incarnation as told by the gospel writer John is different from the others. There are no great announcements from angels to shepherds. There's no description of the harrowing journey Joseph and Mary took to Bethlehem. There is no mention of the exact place where the birth of Jesus took place or of royal visitors. In fact, in the prologue to John's gospel, Jesus is not mentioned by name.

But without all of that, John's words remain powerful and poetic and draw us into the story of his birth. They make us think about who God is and what God is up to in the person of Jesus Christ, offering us a greater glimpse of who God truly is.

Long before taking on human flesh, John tells us, Jesus, The Word, was with God, indeed The Word was God. And then, Jesus is Light, a light that shines so brightly in the darkness that nothing could overcome it.

John's words remind us that God has been working on behalf of humankind since the very beginning of time. The God who said, "*Let there be light*" and who confirmed this light as good – now becomes the light that shines in the December darkness year after year after year and is the light of the world for all people and for all time.

"The Word became flesh and lived among us." John goes on to describe this fleshy God through the narratives of his life and ministry and the account of his suffering and death. The God who came to be among us, is not just an ethereal spirit, but a person who lives and eats and breathes and walks and laughs and cries. And through it we come to know and understand just who our God is and how much he loves us.

We cannot even begin to take the enormity of it all in and so we gaze in awe and wonder at the amazing mystery of it and sing our praises.

But is this enough? May I suggest that celebrating the birthday of Jesus goes much deeper than simply 'keeping Christ in Christmas'. Jesus is the living Word, the one who brought the world into being, but is also the one who remains with us today. God who wants us to be swept up in His story and make "his story" our story.

"To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." (John 1.12)

Those who encountered Jesus that first Christmas were changed by it. The shepherds went on their way rejoicing to tell the good news. The Magi went home by a different route, thus avoiding the evil Herod.

We too have been transformed by his grace and have seen with our own eyes the change that he makes in our daily lives. Let's live as a people who believe that Jesus is with us now as we encounter him in our worship in word and sacrament. And he is present in his body – the church. It is why we say we live an *incarnational faith* – why we seek Jesus not only in the words we say, but in the sacramental life we live.

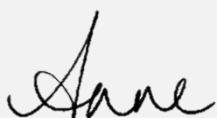
And so, if we are paying attention, we will recognize too that *God in Jesus* is in the ordinary moments of our lives – in the shopping and cleaning and cooking; in the making of school lunches, the time we spend with loved ones; the walk in the snow; playtime with dogs; the shovelling of snow, and the daily grind of work. Jesus is in the kiss we give a loved one – the hug for a friend in trouble – the exchange of peace, the sharing of meals and gifts.

Jesus is in the moment when we look into the eyes of someone the world considers unlovely, and our eyes are opened to see as Jesus sees.

It is why we aim to live the Christian life by not only thinking about it or talking about it, but by doing it. It is why our prayers are not only those of our hearts, but those of our hands and feet. It is why we are called not only to look at the light, but to reflect the light and love of Christ wherever we find ourselves.

Wishing you a wonder-filled Christmas and New Year. May you discover God in Jesus this Christmas and in every moment of the coming year.

With love and good wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne".

