

2020 for Advent and Christmas – A reflection from Sandra Lloyd

At the first Christmas, Mary gave birth to Jesus and quite probably she remembered too, the moment some months earlier, when, visited by an angel she had consented to become pregnant with Jesus, the Christ-child. Denise Levertov writes of the Annunciation. Here is part of her poem:

The Annunciation

We know the scene, the room, variously furnished, almost always a lectern, a book, always the tall lily. Arrived on solemn grandeur of great wings, the angelic ambassador, standing or hovering, whom she acknowledges, a guest.

But we are told of meek obedience. No one mentions courage, the engendering Spirit did not enter her without consent. God waited.

She was free to accept or refuse, choice integral to humanness.

Aren't there annunciations of one sort or another in most lives? Some unwillingly undertake great destinies, enact them in sullen pride, uncomprehending.

More often those moments when roads of light and storm open from darkness in a man or woman are turned away from in dread, in a wave of weakness, in despair and with relief. Ordinary lives continue.

God does not smite them. But the gates close, the pathway vanishes.

She had been a child who played, ate, slept like any other child – but unlike others, wept only for pity, laughed in joy, not triumph. Compassion and intelligence fused in her, indivisible.

Called to a destiny more momentous than any in all of Time, she did not quail, only asked

A simple, "How can this be?" and gravely, courteously, took to heart the angel's reply, perceiving instantly the astounding ministry she was offered.

To bear in her womb infinite weight and lightness, to carry in hidden, finite inwardness, nine months of Eternity, to contain in slender vase of being, the sum of power – in narrow flesh, the sum of light.

Then bring to birth, push out into air, a Man-child needing, like any other milk and love – but who was God.

This year, just like any other year, we are intending to give, and hoping to receive, Christmas presents. To discover what is to be found inside the wrapping paper, hopefully something that is just right for us, something we shall treasure and enjoy. We'll hold the present in our hands, maybe feel it gently, trying to guess what it is and all that separates us from finding out is a thin sheet of wrapping paper. Even now, with childhood long gone, we still experience excitement whenever we are being given a present.

This past year 2020 has been, for most of us, a year like no other. A year that has left us feeling troubled, traumatised, maybe even abandoned. Whilst we hope that life will become 'normal' again, we don't know just what that will mean. That's why, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, and especially when wrapping presents, we need to remind ourselves that Christmas, especially Christmas 2020, is an assurance that God is alongside each one of us, as intimate and real as a loving Mother cradling her new-born child. We are promised that whatever life brings us, God is with us, not only on Christmas Day, but every day that comes.

However, it's easy to forget that.

So, keep a small piece of wrapping paper, either from a present you receive, or a present you give and during the coming year, touch it frequently as a reminder that God has gifted Himself to you, promised to be with you at all times, in trouble and in joy and He is wanting you to open the gift He offers, the gift of Himself.

Christmas Prayers

If you have time in this busy period, try to find some peace and quiet, maybe light a candle and pray one of these prayers from The Church of England Times and Seasons



Holy Jesus,
By being born one of us
And lying humbly in a manger
You show us how much God loves the world.
Let the light of your love always shine in our hearts,
Until we reach our home in heaven
And see you on your throne of glory.
Amen.

Lord, by the song of the angels
You disclosed your birth to your own people
And by the leading of star
Your revealed your glory to strangers
Teach us to know you now
And to make you known to all.
Amen

Midnight Prayers

For many of us, as Christmas Eve turns to Christmas Day we would usually be in church, celebrating and remembering together. If you are still awake, these are some prayers that you can use as Christmas Day begins.

Welcome all wonders of the night
Eternity shut in a span.
Summer in winter; day in night,
Heaven in earth and God in man
Great little one whose all-embracing birth
Brings earth to heaven and heaven to earth

“Do I not fill heaven and earth?” says the Lord.
Now the word is made flesh and laid in a narrow manger.
From eternity to eternity, you are God
And now we see you in a new born child.

Eternal God, who made this most holy night
To shine with the brightness of your one true light;
Bring each of us,
who have known the revelation of that light on earth,
To see the radiance of your heavenly glory;
Through Jesus Christ you Son our Lord
Who is alive and reigns with you,
one God, now and forever
Amen