

Sermon for Advent 4 – 20.12.20 Online Luke 1 26-38

Revd Carol Harley

*Open our eyes to see you
Open ears to hear you
Open our hearts to love you
Lord Jesus Christ*

There goes the story of two Churchwardens who went to their church to make preparations for Morning Prayer and to check everything was in order for the Midnight Mass service. One of them put the Christmas tree lights on and the other went over to the crib scene to switch that light on. She was horrified to find that the figure of Baby Jesus had disappeared. They both raced round to the Vicarage and told the Vicar that the figure of Baby Jesus had been stolen.

He paused for a while to think of anyone who may have removed the figure and remembered one of the young boys in Junior Church, named Matthew, was causing the church leaders a bit of anxiety so he went to Matthew's home to have a word with him and his parents. After some initial chat the Vicar gently asked the boy, *'where is Baby Jesus?'* The boy looked all around the room and up at the ceiling but gave no answer. After waiting a few minutes the Vicar again asked, *'where is Baby Jesus, he has gone missing?'*

This time the boy hung his head looking down at his shoes and said, *'I borrowed Baby Jesus and tied him on my new red shiny bike'* – his early Christmas present – *'because I wanted to say thank you to Jesus by giving him a ride round the block'.*

Well, of course, Matthew shouldn't have taken Baby Jesus from the manger without asking the Vicar but Matthew, it seems, had got one very important thing right, something that we adults often forget. Matthew had taken Baby Jesus out of the manger and put him in his life. The most important thing in Matthew's life was his new red bike and he wanted to make sure that Jesus was in on the experience, in on his life. So he took the crib figure and tied him on the back of his bike and gave him a treat – a spin round the block.

If you asked today, *'where is Jesus?'* The answer comes back from our Gospel reading of the Angel Gabriel's visit to the Virgin Mary when she said to Mary, *'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you will name him Jesus. He will be holy, and will be called the Son of God'.*

'Where is Jesus?' Jesus is not missing, he hasn't been stolen, God is here as the baby Jesus, he is here as one of us - God reveals Jesus, the Son of God, our Saviour and Redeemer.

In just five days Christmas will be here, it's a magical time for many of us – though sadly not for all. On Christmas Eve in millions of homes Father Christmases all over the country will be filling stockings for little children who will excitedly dream of the gifts they hope he will bring.

For us who are older, and sadly a bit wiser, the magic may have gone. The Crib with the stable, the angels, the shepherds and Joseph still catch our imagination. But the marvel of Christmas lies in the words of the Gospel reading when the Angel Gabriel visited Mary and told her that she would bear a son, Jesus, Son of God.

God took our full humanity and so offers us a vision of his glory in the birth of a vulnerable baby, Jesus – the Christ child.

During this last twelve months we have seen an unprecedented rise in major disasters and I have been asked by several of my Carers, ‘Carol - where is God when so many people have suffered unimaginable loss in the world this year? Why does God allow such suffering?’

Where is God? God is not missing. He has been beside each suffering person; he has inspired brilliant scientists to develop an effective vaccine to treat the corona virus in less than one year.

The mass suffering of people this year has culminated in changing the mood of people. People have become more caring, more compassionate and generous. I read recently that more than half of us – a staggering 46 million – regularly volunteer our time to help others and with more and more goods being fairly traded so helping fight the world poverty caring for the world’s most vulnerable has been placed onto our personal agenda.

And it’s in this sort of generous compassion that we see God’s glory. The darkness has not overcome hope as lives are being transformed and rebuilt with the help and generosity of others enabling God’s light to shine in the darkness. Whether in the devastation and rebuilding of this year’s disaster areas or in the quiet spirituality of this Church or our homes *GOD is with us.*

Where is God? God is always where there is Grace, *which is generosity*, and Truth *which is integrity* held together to make loving connections and ripples of hope. God is not missing! God hasn’t been stolen. Because the day when God hears our question ‘*where is God*’ he sends his invitation to us once more refreshed by another Christmas.

So let’s not go home from this service and put Jesus away in a manger or between the pages of an old dusty book in the loft with the decorations. Let’s make this Christmas the one when we take God on board our life – let’s give Jesus a treat like Matthew did when he tied that Crib figure on the back of his bike.

Let us, so to speak, pick up that child from his cradle and take him home with us and within us into our lives and share him with others.

In the name of the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.