

Sermon by the Bishop of Truro, The Rt Revd Tim Thornton

Christmas Morning

John chapter 1 verses 1 – 14

And the Word became flesh, and lived among us V. 14

It is a daunting prospect climbing up those steps to the pulpit on Christmas morning. I know that as I speak there will of course be competing pressures on different member of the congregation, that is you. Some of you will be paying attention to my every word wrapt to hear what nuances and subtleties I am going to give to the Christmas message this year. Others will be waiting to hear if I mention a particular topic or subject that is uppermost in your minds today. There are so many issues about which we could and probably should speak a word on a day such as today. Others again may be taken up with the whole excitement of Christmas Day and be eager to get home to open more presents or simply get on with the feasting and therefore not listening to any of the wise words I say.

So where do I begin and when will I end? There is a great temptation as you enter a pulpit to believe that what you say is important and that in fact it is so important it is going to make a difference. I wonder how many sermons you can remember and how many changes you have made to what you do and how you do it as a direct result of a sermon. Of course the temptation is even greater on Christmas morning when people want to hear your Christmas message : it can so easily lead to what is trying to say something that is too big and too unobtainable. Of course we want world peace and of course we want an end to violence and of course we want everyone to get on with each other. Will all of that ensue from what I say in this pulpit today? I fear that the sense of disproportion can take over and I can believe my own publicity and strive to say something on the world level.

There is at least one other issue to notice about my being up here in this pulpit and that is that I am not of course on the same level as you. I am above you. I am here for a very practical reason to make sure you can all hear me. You wouldn't want to go to church and not be able to hear a sermon would you, and most certainly not on Christmas Day. Yet it does mean that I am not on your level. I don't know how that feels and what you are in fact thinking about as you sit there in this Cathedral today. Again there can be a temptation for me to speak into another world than the one which you inhabit. Now don't worry you may be thinking is he going to come down out of the pulpit and move among us and try and pretend he is one of us. No I am not going to do that. Or even worse is he going to ask us questions or try and interact with us in some trendy way. That would be dreadful, we want to be left alone to daydream and imagine what is in all those packages under the tree. Please don't let him try and do anything *interactive*.

One more thing to notice about being up here is that it gives me a different view to the rest of you. I can see you; well I can see some of you. One of the good things about the way we lay our churches out is that you can't see each other. You can only look at the backs of people's heads in front of you. We don't expect you to connect too much with the people around you, after all this isn't a dinner party is it, this is church.

This is church and this is Christmas Day, bishop, so say something speak into our situation.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us

We celebrate today the birth of a baby. This is not some abstract or philosophical concept. This is not something that can only be explained in profound and complex theological language. This is not something that only certain people can understand. This is natural and straightforward and specific. This is about you and me and the birth of a baby, real life.

We celebrate not birth in general and not again some abstract sense of life. We celebrate a particular birth in a particular place, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

So it is that I believe the most profound truth I can try and communicate with you today is that this is about us, about you and me. I do want to dare to do something interactive. I want you to look at the person next to you on your right and on your left. I want you to notice them. Christmas is about us being noticed. I can try and say something very important about the world situation. I can try and say something about the dreadful situation our world is in. But I want to say to each and every one of you here this morning that Christmas should make a difference to the way you lead your lives. You won't remember this sermon, there is no reason why you should but I hope you might remember that the real meaning of Christmas is that God loves you.

This is not the most helpful way to explain Christmas to you by speaking six feet above contradiction and being set in an environment in which it seems we expect very little interaction between the people here. Today is about celebrating the fact God became human, the word became flesh and he lived among us. He didn't pretend to be human. He didn't live a different special kind of life. He lived among us. How are you going to spend the rest of today? I hope and pray you will today notice the other people in your house and notice those you see on your travels.

We have many major problems in our world and I could pontificate about many of them. At the heart of our broken world is the reality that we don't spend enough quality time with each other. We need to relate to each other we need to be human. I would not be helping by shouting at you from a pulpit. One of the sad lessons of this year is that we have lost the willingness and ability to trust anyone. This I believe is because we do not spend time, quality time with our relationships. We run away and hide from the reality of life. We believe that we can achieve everything on our own and in our own strength. The message of Christmas is that God became flesh and lived among us. He bothered with us because he loves us and he wants us to love each other and we can only do that if we notice each other and spend time with each other.

Happy Christmas 2009! May you be with the people you love this day and may you accept that you are loved by God. He loves you so much he lives among us. Dare we notice him, not lead plastic lives or pretend lives, or play games with pulpits and processions but relate to each other and be real with each other and spend time noticing another person.

May happiness be yours this Christmas time.