

Advent: Daily Reflections

Cysur a Llawenwydd: Anrheg Nadolig



Comfort and Joy: A Christmas Gift

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for the Diocese of St Asaph



ESGOBAETH LLANELWY
DATGLOI **EIN**
POTENTIAL
UNLOCKING **OUR**
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DIOCESE OF ST ASAPH

Comfort and Joy: A Christmas Gift

Day 1 – Rest

Read – Matthew 11:28

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

I have a problem. I'm a workaholic. Days off and holidays are just for wimps. But there's a downside: I sometimes just run out of steam and tiredness and lethargy kick in.

I guess at the moment, many of us are suffering from exhaustion or stress or conflicting feelings which are dragging us down.

How do we 'do' Christmas this year with the restrictions we face?

At this time of the year we would normally expect to be run off our feet with Christmas preparations, parties, shopping, events to organise; but there's not much of that this year. Yet we still feel tired.

What does Jesus say?

Come to him, God's gift at Christmas. He didn't come to give us extra burdens, or expectations, or pressure, but to give rest. Rest from our own expectations, rest from the expectations of others.

So will we come to him? Our Christmas gift is not a cruel taskmaster, but a bringer of rest.

Reflect

Jesus once said, 'Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while:'

(Mark 6:31 KJV)

Someone else once said 'If you don't take time to 'come apart' with Jesus, you may simply come apart.

Have you known the truth of this in your life?

What steps can you take to make sure it doesn't happen this year?

Does this thought bring joy or comfort to your life?

As you enter into God's rest, how can you respond to His gift?

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Day 2 – Forgotten

Read - Luke 1:18

Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years.”

This verse is taken from the encounter the angel announces to Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. They are to have a son who we will know as John the Baptist. They are increasing in age and are childless or barren. They may have felt forgotten, not cared for, and ‘on the scrap heap’. Life was ending.

Every one of us has been ‘forgotten’ at some point in our lives. Childlessness, divorce or separation, the loneliness that comes after losing one you love, a physical problem which makes you the spotlight of hurtful words, being bullied, public failure, personal feelings of rejection, financial pressures, gossip. And we ask, ‘where is God?’

Zechariah and Elizabeth were not forgotten. It may have felt like it to them, or it may have felt that God didn’t care. It is tempting in our pain to think we are alone.

Just because we feel forgotten doesn’t mean we are. In fact, every Christmas card, decoration, carol reminds us that we are not forgotten. Jesus, the Christmas gift, came for the broken and the barren.

Reflect

When are the times you have felt forgotten:

By people

By your boss

By God

How does this verse help reassure you?

Does age make any difference to how God may want to use us?

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Day 3 – Timing

Read – Luke 1:24 & 25

After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favour and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Why are we where we are? As I reflect on the course of my career, I often wonder that. Why has God put me somewhere at a particular time? Is it an accident? Is it coincidence? Or part of some bigger plan that I don't understand?

With this reading we may wonder why God didn't act sooner (remember their age), or why he didn't give them the child they wanted sooner, or give John the Baptist to a younger couple who maybe had more energy for the job?

But what does God do? He casts his eye across the land of Israel and finds a woman who can't have a baby! While all her friends in the little desert town seem to have got pregnant, she has remained childless. Then God waits and waits until she is past childbearing years, so that even if she could have conceived a child, it is now too late. She is doubly disqualified as a special mother for this special child.

Many times, in life, God can wait for a situation to go from bad to worse; for things to seem like they are getting out of control, with no possible remedy. We might say: 'There's no possible way out of this.' Then, the God of the universe says: 'Really? Watch this!'

Reflect

Are there times in your life when you thought something was a mistake, and it turned out for the good?

Do you feel the timing is off in your life at the moment?

Why can it be hard to trust God's timing?

Are there any remedies for that?

What we are tempted to call a mistake, God sees as perfect timing.

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Day 4 – Reputation

Read - Luke 1:34

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

Mary's response to the angel telling her that she is going to have the baby Jesus.

Just in case you don't know the background, here are the highlights

Mary was in her teens. She is engaged to a man called Joseph. The Angel Gabriel tells her she is going to have a baby and Joseph isn't the Father. The child would be from the Holy Spirit and his name would be Jesus and he would save people from their sins.

Think of the gossip: An unmarried teenage mother!

Think of the scandal and condemnation from her own people.

Even if Mary was given the opportunity to explain (most people would condemn her without ever asking for an explanation) what was she going to say? Would anyone believe her story of the appearance of an angel and a child conceived by the Holy Spirit? Mary was just an ordinary girl. No one was going to believe the story. As a result, she may have lived the rest of her life with people talking about her “immoral lifestyle” before marriage.

From our perspective, this would be unfair to Mary, we know her as wonderfully faithful, sacrificing her reputation for God's work.

Reflect

What have you had to endure that wasn't your fault?

Have you ever had to risk your reputation for the sake of Jesus?

Mary reminds us that it's not always easy to follow Jesus. Sometimes we'll be misrepresented, but God knows our hearts and motive and surely that's what matters!

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Day 5 – Overwhelmed

Read - Luke 1:35

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

Mary was given the awesome responsibility of being the mother of the Saviour. This might not seem a big thing to us, but what would have happened had she made mistakes. She was entrusted with the Son of God. This was one child you wouldn't want to mess up. Even though Mary trusted in God this was a huge responsibility and I wonder if she felt overwhelmed.

Life can feel overwhelming at times and it can be a struggle to survive. You may even feel disqualified from serving God because of it. If you read the bible carefully, God often chooses the overwhelmed: Joseph, Moses, David, Sarah, Hannah, Elizabeth, the Disciples. God seems to specialise in using the overwhelmed.

Reflect

At what points in your life have you felt overwhelmed?

Do you feel inadequate for the task you believe God has given you?

Do you know what Mary's response was?

Verse 38 says: *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered.
"May your word to me be fulfilled."*

What prevents you from responding in a similar way?

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Day 6 – Shattered Dreams

Read – Matthew 1:18-19

“Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.”

This verse tells us a lot about Joseph. In spite of the embarrassment he faced, the rejection, the hurt and betrayal, he had decided to break the contract privately. In Jesus' day engagement was a contract with legal consequences. He could have caused Mary public humiliation; he could have demanded that she be stoned to death as an adulteress. Instead, he chose to release her from her commitment to him.

Maybe it was because he loved Mary, or perhaps he didn't want to make the scandal bigger than it already was. Or maybe he was a godly man who believed what had been told.

Joseph did what he was told despite his hopes and dreams for the future self-destructing before his eyes. His life took a detour he hadn't planned by trusting and obeying God.

Reflect

Has your life taken a detour?

Have your dreams evaporated before your eyes?

Have you felt crushed with disappointment?

Comfort and Joy: A Christmas Gift Day 7 - Privilege

Read - Matthew 1:24-25

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

We read that Joseph decided to put his trust in God and took a giant step forward of faith. A remarkable response to a difficult situation.

But I wonder how often Joseph looked at Mary and had to make the same decision again. Were there days he cried out to God in anger or anxiety, or did he regularly trust when he didn't really understand?

By trusting, think of the privilege Joseph received. He sees the Son of God born into the world. He hears the story of the shepherds. He listens to the Magi as they recount their experiences. He is part of a magical night in that stable.

Reflect

When are you tempted to give up?

When have you kept going despite the hassles?

What did you get to glimpse that you may have missed?

What was God's gift to you?

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Day 8 - Impatience

Read - Luke 2:7

and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Did you know the most famous character in the Christmas story isn't actually mentioned in the Bible? The darling of the school nativity play, the innkeeper, has the most crucial line in the whole play: "There's no room in the inn." Of course, that line is not in the bible – sorry!

We often have a negative view of the innkeeper – too wrapped up in his business to pay attention to Mary and Joseph, or perhaps too tired, dealing with impatient customers all day and just trying to do the best he could.

If we're honest we can sympathise with the innkeeper. We're too busy, too tired, dealing with impatient people, just trying our best.

But we can learn from the innkeeper. Somethings are worth making time for and we all choose how we spend our time.

The innkeeper chose to respond to his paying customers and turned Mary and Joseph away.

Reflect

How do you handle impatient people?

Do their demands take priority over what is important?

What things are worth making time for?

How can you change your schedule?

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Day 9- Loud Voices

Read - Luke 2:7

and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

The innkeeper was busy and so missed the most important moment in human history, the birth of Jesus. Before we are too quick to condemn him, we are quite like him if we are honest.

How often do we miss Jesus because we are doing things that demand our time and attention?

We make time for our jobs, for sports, for our kids' activities, for leisure, for hobbies, for TV, for hanging out with friends, etc. You may not make time for all those things, but the fact is that we make time for the things we deem important. When we don't make time for the Lord, it reveals what we really deem important. It shows that we value these other things above Him.

And let's be honest, many of the things clamouring for our time aren't that important. They might be urgent, but they are not important. They take our time, our energy, our money; we prioritise by what shouts the loudest, and so Jesus comes bottom of the list.

Jesus doesn't shout, he whispers. We must decide to make time for what or who is important rather than who shouts the loudest.

Reflect

How do you make time for Jesus?

Amongst the noise, how do you hear the voice of Jesus?

What could go from your diary to allow you space to hear Him?

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Day 10 - Generosity

Read - Luke 2:7

and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

There is another way of viewing the innkeeper; that is, he gave them all he could.

You see, maybe he felt sorry for Mary and Joseph and couldn't send them away. They clearly needed a room, so he offered them the only space he had. He couldn't give them what they needed or deserved but he gave them what he could.

It is incredible that the innkeeper did what he did. We know the background to the story - the young couple arriving at the busiest time of year, at night, and she's pregnant. We know the baby will change the course of history. However, the innkeeper knew none of this. He only knew that this couple needed a room and shelter, and he chose to give what he could.

Of course, his culture was one of hospitality; you always did what you could to help someone in need.

Reflect

When have you turned someone away?

How did you feel afterwards?

When have you helped someone in need?

Have you helped out God by helping someone else?

Have you ever been reluctant to give because you thought your gift was not 'good enough'?

Comfort and Joy: A Christmas Gift Day 11 - Invitation

Read - Luke 2:8

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night

Some of the most significant people in the bible are shepherds - Jacob, David, Amos. However, being a shepherd wasn't a great job. In fact, being a shepherd was despised. Shepherds couldn't give evidence in a court because they were seen as being unreliable. They were seen as social outcasts.

So why does God invite them to his son's birthday party? Perhaps to show that everyone's welcome to his son's party. There is no-one who is a 'nobody' in His eyes.

Reflect

What would your reaction be to the shepherds showing up?

What would your reaction to the shepherds showing up at your church?

Would you welcome them?

Or would you turn them away?

Can you think of a time when something similar has happened to you?

How do you think God responds to your reaction?

Comfort and Joy: A Christmas Gift Day 12 - Outcast

Read - Luke 2:8

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night

I guess the world of Jesus' day would write off the shepherds as dirty, unreliable outcasts.

If we are honest, we all write people off. Perhaps someone has made a mistake and so can't do a particular job. Perhaps they have a strange accent, do an unsociable job, or are from a different culture to us.

Who does God invite to his son's birthday party?

The ones the world treats as an outcast.

And today, our world still writes people off. That's why our society is full of people who feel anonymous and insignificant. Perhaps the child who is seen as 'average', the teenager who doesn't like what they see in the mirror, the person with the minimum wage job and feels people look down on them. They might be part of your own family.

Reflect

Who are the outcasts in your community?

How can you make them feel welcome at your church?

Is there a programme of social action that you could be part of
or support this Christmas?

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Day 13 - Significance

Read - Isaiah 61:1-3

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the
captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion —
to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,
the oil of joy instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.*

What we see from the shepherds is that God doesn't measure people the way we do. Jesus came into the world to reach the insignificant, broken, and anonymous. Maybe you have said at some point, 'God could never love me because of what I've done'. You may feel you are beyond the reach of God's grace. The message of the shepherds says you are wrong. The person who knows and admits their weakness is the one who knows they need God's Christmas gift.

Jesus came for the shepherds, the outcast, the insignificant, the anonymous, you. You may sit in a crowd and feel no one cares about you. You may feel no one would miss you if you weren't around, but God sees you, He knows you, He loves you, and He invites you to the party.

Reflect

When do you feel insignificant?

How does that affect your security?

Do you know Jesus came for You?

How does it make you feel knowing that God sent Jesus for you?

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Day 14 - Excuses

Read - Luke 2 15

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

When the angels left the shepherds, they decided they needed to go and see the baby.

Think of the excuses they could have made.

- Who will look after the sheep?
- We haven't got the right clothes.
- Someone else could do it better than us.
- Who wants shepherds anyway?

The same problem is around today. We are invited into a relationship with the Lord of life and we make excuses. Maybe we feel unworthy, maybe we've done too many things wrong, maybe we have too many other commitments.

Remember what Jesus himself said in John 6:37: "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

He came to reach each of us, regardless of how we see ourselves. All He asks is that we enter that relationship for ourselves.

Reflect

What excuses do people give for not wanting to meet Jesus?

What is there in your life that stops you receiving Jesus' invitation?

Do you see that whatever it is doesn't matter?

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Day 15 - Connected

Read - Luke 2:20

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

When the shepherds reached the new-born baby, we are told they worshipped. Their hearts were stirred. So, when they went home they told others what they had seen and heard, and praised God. As we respond to the great news of Christmas, our natural response is one of worship. In that one moment the lives of the shepherds were changed forever. They hit the town singing, dancing, telling everyone about the baby they had seen. They didn't care how people reacted, they just told everyone.

And isn't that true worship? Not a sequence of religious activities or particular songs we sing. But rather meeting Jesus personally, allowing him to change our lives and telling others about it.

You can be excited about Christmas this year. We may not be able to sing the carols, or go the Crib service, but you can come to Him with open hands and an open heart and allow Him to change your life forever.

It means being willing to put yourself aside and running to him. It means giving up your agenda and taking up His. It means putting all your trust and hope in what God has said. It means having the heart of a shepherd. You matter to God whether you realise it or not. Christmas is about God's desire to connect with you.

Reflect

Are you excited about Christmas this year?

♥ If not, why not?

Do you see that it is about receiving and responding to an invitation?

Are you prepared to allow Jesus to change your life? ♥

Comfort and Joy: A Christmas Gift Day 16 - A Christmas gift – AirPods

Read - 1 Kings 19:11-13

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

It is said that one of the most popular presents this year are AirPods. To you and me, a fancy form of headphones. These days wherever you go, you see people with them in their ears, music playing, radio or YouTube broadcasts coming through them. We also have emails, text messages, Facebook posts, WhatsApp messages constantly shouting at us.

Fortunately, God doesn't shout at us; he whispers.

Have you ever heard anyone say to you: "God has never spoken to me, he doesn't exist," and wanted to reply: "God exists but you aren't going to hear Him speak to you unless you listen."

To hear God speak we must take time to be still. To listen we need to build times of true quiet into our lives when we are free from distraction. God can speak to all of us through a whisper, through His Word applied by God's Spirit, and sometimes even from the lips of a teacher of the Word.

Reflect

Has God ever spoken to you?

Can you build in time to be still?

Is there any noise in your life you need to remove?

Comfort and Joy: A Christmas Gift

Day 17 - Opposition

Read - Matthew 2: 7-8

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

The magi had reached Jerusalem on their journey. They met King Herod who was less than enthusiastic about what they had to tell him. He sent them on their way with instructions to report back to him. No offers of help or support, or even directions. The Magi were on their own.

Quite often as we follow Jesus, we will feel as though we have no support, or even worse downright opposition. However, the Magi refused to be deterred by the lukewarm response. They refused to turn back even when things weren't quite how they expected them to be.

Following Jesus boldly will not be popular. We won't win friends or influence people. In fact, we may well encounter opposition as well and will feel very isolated. People who talk about Jesus will upset the status quo. They force people to question their priorities, how they use their time, the way they spend their money, and how they live their lives. We are often more comfortable with people who are half hearted in their faith.

However, if we are serious about Jesus, we have to tune out those voices of discouragement, and listen to the One voice and follow it.

Reflect

Have you faced opposition because of your faith?

How do people react as you talk about your faith?

Do people who are fervent in their faith make you uncomfortable?

Where could you find support from as you journey in faith?

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Day 18 - A Christmas Gift – Sat Nav

Read - Matthew 2:2

'and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."'

I hate Sat Nav. The thought of having a machine in the car telling me what to do fills me with horror.

And yet, listening may be hard, but following can be even harder.

The Magi could have written up what they had seen in this star in an academic article or written a Facebook post. They could have gained the knowledge but never acted on it. Knowledge without being engaged.

It can be the same with us. We can rejoice in the knowledge we have gained from our bible studies; we can write articles in magazines without ever doing what God has called us to do.

We can debate the best ways to help those in need without ever taking action to help. We can discuss the best methods of evangelism without ever sharing our faith, we can discuss prayer without ever praying, we can advocate sacrificial living without ever doing anything that costs us anything.

The Magi took action. They made the long and tedious journey to meet Jesus. They were committed and endured hardships and difficulties along the way

Reflect

How do you view people who put their faith into action?

When was the last time you took practical action to help someone?

When have you shared your faith?

What stops you from putting your faith into action?

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Day 19 - A Christmas Gift – Babygro

Read - Luke 2:7

and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

I have friends who are expecting their first grandchild just before Christmas. All the talk is baby talk; they're busy buying this and that for the baby. It has to be the best. But I guess that's what Grandparents do - get the best for their grandchild.

Jesus didn't have the best. He was wrapped, we read, in cloths. This was the custom of the day in the Middle East. When a baby was born, he or she was rubbed with salt and oil and then wrapped in long bands of cloth. This gave the baby's arms and legs strength and protection and helped prevent the baby from scratching itself.

Just think for a moment, this is God, creator of the universe humbling himself to become like us. Enduring the trials and temptations of this life just like us, the pain and the suffering. Going to the cross on our behalf, being buried and rising again.

Able to identify with us in our struggles and temptations. As the writer to the Hebrews declares:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Because he wore cloths, we can receive mercy and grace when we are going through difficult times.

Reflect

Do you think Jesus knows how you feel today?

What would you like him to know?

Do you take hold of the assurance that because he was human we receive grace in our time of need?

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Day 20 - A Christmas gift – a Christmas Jumper

Read - Matthew 22:11-12

But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless.

If everyone in the office or at a party is wearing a Christmas jumper but for some reason you're not, it can be embarrassing. It looks as if you're an outsider.

In Bible times, a wedding garment was given to wedding guests. This made everyone equal. However, in the story Jesus tells in Matthew 22, one man shows up wearing his own clothes. It is making the point that our own efforts won't get us into heaven. The only way to get in is on God's terms, and that is by being clothed with Christ.

Galatians 3:26 & 27 - So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ

Romans 13:14 - Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

To get into heaven we need to be clothed as God (the King) wants. And what a gracious God, through the baby lying in a manger, the Christmas gift, He has provided the clothing needed.

Reflect

Our own efforts won't gain us access to heaven; how do you react to that?

Do you see the baby Jesus as the clothing we need to enter heaven?

Does this help you see how Christmas is good news?

Isaiah 61:10

I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God.

For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Comfort and Joy: A Christmas Gift

Day 21 - A Great Big God

Read - Psalm 147: 3-4

He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.

He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.

Don't you love those crisp clear winter nights when you can look at the sky and see the stars? I find the stars fascinating. Just in our galaxy it is said there are over one hundred billion stars and of course, Genesis and Psalm 148:5 remind us that they were created by God. It is mind boggling. The God of the bible, our creator god is no little god, and he knows the name of every one of them.

But what is really great is the preceding verse.

The God, who is so powerful, He can create stars, whose greatness is so vast that he knows each of them by name, is not too busy to be bothered by the us. For 'he heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds'.

Isn't that amazing? He is not so busy as to ignore a parent's prayer for their child, or a widow's tears for her departed husband, and a heart wrenching cry for help. And of course, being such a great big God, he has the resources to answer the cry.

Reflect

Do you feel God is too busy to hear your prayers?

How does the knowledge that God is powerful help you when you pray?

How can this give you confidence as you approach him?

Comfort and Joy: A Christmas Gift

Day 22 - Gardening?

Read - Genesis 1:27

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them

Quite often, at funerals, I've had to read the following poem

*The kiss of the sun for pardon
The song of the birds for mirth
One is nearer to God's heart in the garden
Than anywhere else on earth
(Dorothy Gurney)*

And I have to say, although it may be very nice, I struggle with it, not just because I'm not a gardener.

You see according to the Bible reading, it is people who bear God's image. This means that we are actually nearer to God when we are close to other people, sitting on the bus, queuing at the supermarket. However, messed up and exasperating we may find other people, they bear God's image and matter to him.

It is also why you matter to him. You bear his image, and that's why at Christmas, through Jesus, he became one of us to take us to our heavenly paradise.

Reflect

What is it about gardens that help us feel closer to God?

Do the words of the poem resonate with you?

How do you feel about the claim that we are closer to God
when we are with other people?

How do you feel about the statement 'you bear the image of God'?

Does it make you feel special? Loved? Precious?

Comfort and Joy: A Christmas Gift

Day 23 - God loves you

Read - John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

It is wonderful to know someone loves you, with all your faults and imperfections. Sure, God sees your sin and failures, he knows you better than you know yourself, and yet He loves You.

If we're honest, everyone longs to be truly loved. We spend our lives trying to be the sort of person others will love. We try to hide our bruises and hurts because we are afraid if others saw us as we really are, they wouldn't like what they see.

Part of the wonderful news of Christmas is that you don't have to worry; you don't have to make yourself into something for God to love you. He loves you as you are.

You may feel unloved and unlovable, but God loves you anyway.

You may feel you have messed up your life, and are undeserving, but God loves you so much that he came to earth as a baby for you.

He doesn't look at the bruises. He looks at what HE created you to be.

He believes in you even if you don't believe in yourself. He sees you as someone worth an infinite amount; unique and special made in His image.

Reflect

What bruises are there in your life that you are trying to hide?

How does the thought that God sees them make you feel?

How does the thought that God looks at who He created you to be make you feel?

Comfort and Joy: A Christmas Gift

Day 24 - A Christmas Gift – A Mop and Bucket

Read - Revelation 3:20

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

A wise old Vicar of mine once suggested when I was young, to think of my life as a house. Jesus comes to the front door and asks to come in. Now most of us might open it a crack but we keep the chain on the door, and only ask Jesus to do certain things for us. However, he continues to knock and ask for entrance.

Why don't I want to open the door further? Because I'm scared of the mess. It's a bit like those TV comedies where a family hire a cleaner and proceed to clean the house before the cleaner arrives. We don't want the cleaner to see the chaos and junk. And likewise, we don't want Jesus to see the chaos and junk.

Either that or we're like my grandma, who used to allow visitors into the front room that was always kept clean and tidy. Perhaps you do that. The clean and tidy room is always the one nearest the front window, so it looks good to everyone outside.

What we don't see is that Jesus is stood at the door with a mop and bucket. He knows about the mess and has come to begin the clean-up operation. He sees, and knows, and yet still loves and wants us to live as part of his family. All he asks is that we let him in.

And we do that by asking him in. No special words or mantra. You don't need someone else to do it for you or with you. Just come to him with an open heart and open hands. Admit your life is a mess and ask him to begin the clean-up operation, to make all things clean and have a brand-new start.

Reflect

Does the image of life as a house resonate with you?

How far are you prepared to allow Jesus in?

If you had a brand-new start, what would you like to achieve?

Comfort and Joy: A Christmas Gift Day 25 - A Christmas gift – Peace

Read - Luke 2:14

*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom
his favour rests.*

This Christmas peace seems far away. Anxiety and worry crowd in, about our health, our family's safety. Wars and rumours of wars continue to circulate. What impact will economic difficulties have on our lives. Peace is elusive.

And yet the angels sing 'and on earth peace....'

Peace? How?

Peace with God

Romans 5:1: Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Peace through difficulties

John 14:27: Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Peace as a lifestyle

Isaiah 9:6-7: For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

The gift of peace Jesus brings this Christmas is not only a one-time act of reconciliation between us and God; it is not only a strengthening when times are hard. It is a continuous state.

Jesus came to stop the madness of our lives. He came so we could get out of the rat race and enjoy the life He created for us. He wants us to see that life is a gift. It is meant to be a walk with him.

Reflect

What difference will it make to tomorrow knowing that Jesus' gift of peace is a continuous state?

What difference will it make to tomorrow knowing that life is a gift from God, meant to be walked with Jesus?

Comfort and Joy: A Christmas Gift

Day 26 – A response

Receive the gift -

"As though God were intreating through us, we beg you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)

Give thanks for the gift -

*I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.
(1 Corinthians 1:4)*

Over the last few weeks, we've heard about the gift that God offers to us through Jesus. What will be our response to this gift? Shall we say no, or shall we say yes? Since God has come to us and urges us to receive his gift, for what reason would we say no? Let us recognise the great gift God offers. Let us take hold of it gladly.

Reflect

Have you ever offered a gift to someone and they refused to accept it?

How did you feel?

How does God feel when someone refuses to take the gift He offers?

Assuming you accept the gift God offers this Christmas, do you:

respond like Mary with faithful obedience?

respond like the shepherds with joy and telling others?

respond like the innkeeper, too busy?

respond like the Innkeeper and give what you can?

With your time, talents, and money?

If you feel God is calling you to respond with your life, then please speak to your local clergy, and sign up to a START course or Alpha course.

If you feel God is calling you to respond with your talents and time, then speak to your local clergy or a member of Ministry Team in the Diocese:

<https://dioceseofstasaph.org.uk/diocesan-office/ministry-team/>

If you feel God is calling you to respond with money, please speak to your church treasurer or the Director of Resources in the Diocese and sign up for Gift Direct:

<https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/gift-direct/start-giving-your-parish/>