

Christmas Day, 2011

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

It's Christmas day—the day we have been anticipating for some time now, and you have chosen to set aside a portion of this day to come to the Church of St Leonard to be with family, friends and neighbours so that together we can give thanks to God for sending our Lord and saviour, Jesus the Christ, into the world more than 2,000 years ago. It is good to be here with you right now.

on Friday night I watched on tv—as some of you may have— the compelling BBC drama scripted by Tony Jordan, titled “The Nativity”. It's a dramatic retelling of the nativity story; and the portrayal of Mary is central to it.

What makes Mary special is the fact that her love of life includes cherishing, and taking a stand for, her own purity and piety in a world where there are choices.

Our gospel reading for today tells the story of the shepherds who were tending their sheep on a hillside when an angel appeared to them.

The angel says: “I bring you good news of great joy for all the people... to you is born a saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord”.

The angel tells them where they will find the baby Jesus—lying in a manger in Bethlehem and they choose to go to find the Christ child. Once they get to the stable, they bow down and worship the child. The devotion of these shepherds heralds the healing and saving mission of humanity's saviour, whose life and ideas reassure us that, even if everyday life seems to throw curve balls, there is a spiritual essence to each of us that is the truer story of our lives.

The birth of Jesus, the Son of God, [which is called “the incarnation”—when God took human flesh], is the physical demonstration by God of God's love for all of humanity. In the Gospel of John, chapter 3, verse 16, we hear:

*For God so loved the world*

*that he gave his only son,  
so that everyone who believes in him  
may not perish but may have eternal life.*

Jesus has come to restore the relationship between human beings and God. Christ our saviour is born as a little child—born to bring us back into relationship with our God ... a relationship that we have often turned away from in our sinfulness.

But now we know that we are saved; Jesus restores our relationship with God so that we can know and love God forever. And, once we have the confidence of a loving relationship with God to count on, we can share this love with one another in the true spirit of Christmas.

Just as the shepherds, having seen the Christ child on that first Christmas day, told everyone the good news of the birth of our Lord and saviour, Jesus Christ, let us, also, choose to spread the message of good will to all we meet just as the angels did.

May the peace and joy of Christmas be with you this Christmas day and throughout the Christmas season. Amen.