

## Christmas 1 2025

By God's Grace may I speak in the name of the God who is and was and is to come. Amen.

Only a week ago it was Christmas. For many this will have meant big celebrations, lots of food, decorations and gifts and a whole lot of excitement. But then it eventually comes to an end and the reality of having to clean up and return to everyday life slowly dawns on us. Christmas might have been really lovely; it might have been disappointing or even very difficult for us. And now we are slowly returning to everyday life. Nothing much has changed, the bills still need paying, work is still the same, the kitchen could really do with a proper clean and when switching on the news it turns out the world is still one big mess. So was it worth it? Does Christmas really mean anything, if it's just this moment of sparkling joy and celebration, followed by the same old dreary everyday life? Does any of it make a difference?

That is kind of where the story is at in our gospel reading today. The initial excitement and joy over Jesus' birth has died down. The shepherds are back with their flock in the fields and the magi are off on their long and exhausting journey back home. And Mary, Joseph and Jesus have to flee their home country and become refugees in Egypt, because Herod is scared of the hint of a possible challenger to his throne and power, so he decides to murder all babies under the age of two. How is that for a brutal reality check? For the shepherds, the magi, Mary and Joseph, how did the birth of Jesus make a difference? There is no indication it made anyone's life better and in the case of Joseph and Mary it clearly had a very destabilising and negative effect,

as protecting their child meant, they suddenly had to leave everything they knew behind and start over in a new and foreign country, where they didn't understand the language or the culture and likely had very few, if any friends.

So, what difference does it make, why is Christmas such a big deal, if we can see no real change? Does that helpless infant in the manger really make a difference?

I think yes, that helpless infant in the manger makes a difference. But maybe not in the way we would wish. That baby in the manger is not a magic wand that God waves and suddenly all the injustice, pain and suffering in the world are gone. What God does on Christmas is more of a slow burn.

God became one of us, entering our human vulnerability and frailty. That is a different approach to what we might sometimes wish for, where God swoops in and simply fixes the whole mess in one go. It's a gentler approach, that doesn't paint the world in black and white. God became one of us and rather than transforming the whole world at once, God began the slow work of transforming one human being at a time.

Have you ever had an encounter, a moment in your life, that looking back, changed you, changed the trajectory of your life or changed the way you see the world, God or yourself? I certainly have. Some have been very undramatic and it only slowly unfolded that it had been life changing and some have been very dramatic and I knew that this moment would change my life.

We don't know what became of the shepherds or the magi after they had encountered the baby Jesus. For some of them this encounter might have only become a good story to tell. Of angels singing in a

field at night and a tiny little baby in a manger and how they went to see the baby and it was really special and a bit weird. Of traveling for weeks and weeks, of asking for help in the royal palace, but ending up in a stable and giving precious gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to a little, poor baby boy to whom the stars had led them. About dreams to avoid the palace on the way back and how the whole experience was rather weird but quite the adventure.

For some of the shepherds and magi though, this encounter with a helpless baby in a manger likely became a life changing moment. The angels in the fields and the encounter with the helpless baby would have taught them, that although most people would disregard them and avoid them because of their job, they matter to God. God sees them and counts them as important enough to specially send angels to announce to them the birth of the Messiah. It would change the way they see themselves and the way they would treat others. Knowing themselves loved and cherished by God, they might have become kinder, more generous and patient with others and that in turn would have affected the lives of the people around them.

For some of the magi their encounter of that little baby might have toppled their understanding of what it means to have power and influence, of who matters and who doesn't. As a result, they might have started to see people, who were invisible to them before. Because of that baby in the stable they might have started to treat those they overlooked previously with respect and care. And that in turn would have affected the lives of the people around them.

For some Christmas might be just a good story to tell from time to time. But for others, Christmas does make a difference, because encountering that baby in the manger transforms our lives. This baby enables us to understand that we are beloved and cherished by God. Or

it challenges our understanding of power, of who matters and who doesn't. Or it transforms our view of God, the world and ourselves in another way. And yes, the big celebrations are over and everyday life returns and the problems we were facing before are still there. But we carry the light of the Christ child into the world, into our everyday lives. That is why at baptism we are given a candle, as a reminder. A reminder that we have been transformed by our encounter with Christ, that God's light shines in us and that although there is much darkness in this world, it only takes a little flame to bring light into the darkness. You might think the little light, that you carry is too feeble to make a difference. But that little baby in the manger, fragile and insignificant as it might have looked, keeps transforming people's lives, even 2000 years later. And so who knows how you might change people's lives by carrying that little light into your everyday life this coming week and in this new year.

Amen.