

Sunday 3rd January 2021

2nd Sunday after Christmas

Haddington West with Garvald and Morham

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

“God the Lord has spoken and summoned the world from the rising of the sun to its setting. God shines out of Zion, perfect in beauty.” Ps.50, 1-2

Collect: God of power and life, you are the glory of all who believe in you. Fill the world with your splendour and show the nations the light of your truth; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. AMEN

O what a mystery I see

1 O what a mystery I see,
what marvellous design,
that God should come as one of us,
a Son in David's line.
Flesh of our flesh, of woman born,
our humanness He owns;
and for a world of wickedness
His guiltless blood atones.

2 This perfect Man, incarnate God,
by selfless sacrifice
destroyed our sinful history,
all fallen Adam's curse.
In Him the curse to blessing turns,
my barren spirit flowers,
as over the shattered power of sin
the cross of Jesus towers.

Words and music by Graham Kendrick

Jn.1,10-18

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, 'This is the one I spoke about when I said "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me."'.) Out of his fulness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Dear friends

Before the Incarnation (“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” – v.14) let the heart be upright and become still. The chatter and noise of all the thoughts and ideas about God that we carry within us and that clamour for our attention – let it fade away (as you realise that here they are so out of place). So too the silence with which our secular age has sought to mute the notion of ‘God’ and ban it to but the most private and irrelevant parts of the mind – let its grip be gone in the strength of this stillness which alone is proper before God (it too is found to be out of place here).

Let the heart become still. And the things that it is busy with, the planning and plotting, the desiring and regretting, the grieving and sorrowing, the accusing and condemning – let it all be embraced by stillness so that the heart may wonder and look out.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Let the heart be still. For in this stillness and out of it we perceive the One who is God and is also man, the fact that here is now full and reliable knowledge of/about God, but also us, because we are made for knowing God. *“No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”* (v.18)

We must shed the idea, or the notion, that the incarnation is a piece of religious, spiritual content that we must understand (a piece of knowledge which if we ‘handle’ it correctly gives us some insight) and we must take seriously the notion that no one has ever seen God. He has made us, we know of Him and long for Him, but our sinful ways have made this relationship impossible. All our talking and thinking about God does not yield true knowledge or amount to it, knowing God is utterly and decidedly beyond our grasp. And with the lack of knowing God goes the lack of knowing ourselves, goes the lack of our true humanity. (That is how sin is the one great problem the world has but cannot solve)

But the incarnation is about God coming into our world – *the Word became flesh* – to give the world knowledge of Himself, by becoming man and enabling man, as it were, to lay eyes on Him and know Him – and doing so by dealing with sin (Mt.1,21: *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*)

The incarnation means God has revealed Himself in the world and to the world – and Christ Jesus is that revelation. Every attempt, be that religious or be it of reason alone, to know God apart from Christ must fail, it is an exercise in deception of oneself and each other. If you look for God other than in Christ you will miss Him. Every search for God that would not find Christ but would reject him, is stuck in darkness. Every lofty idea about God, and about man (!), which dismisses Christ in his way of cross and resurrection, is itself eternally dismissed. And everyone who holds that God cannot be known, can now because of Christ know better (and ought to).

But Christ Jesus is also the knowledge of God. That is why and how it is a thing of power. The knowledge of God is not just a piece of information which we then do something with, or not; it is a thing of power, *doing* something to us, involving us in something God *does*. The person that knows God is taken up into a movement that revolutionizes everything. Knowledge of God is never anything less than a complete remaking and reshaping, a total overhaul of human nature which shall have a redeeming effect on all the rest of creation, it is a path of dying and of rising, a power to bring the dead to life, the sinner to righteousness, it is a new birth (Jn.3).

It doesn’t come bigger or more powerful than the knowledge of God. And Christ is this knowledge. Wherefore John in his gospel points out that it was those who received Christ who were given the power to become children of God, were given the power of the new birth.

Where is knowledge of God but in the heart that receives Christ, in those who believe in his name? It is the point of the incarnation that Christ Jesus be received – not just looked at from a distance, known about, admired, studied, venerated, but received – so that he should impart to us the knowledge of God, be God with us and save us.

Dear friends, in Jesus Christ if we receive him, we see and know the Father heart of God as He loves and saves, we see and know that He is full of mercy, that He is gracious and is the truth of what we shall be and what even now we become – God’s children. John saw it in his encounter with Jesus,

together with others who received Jesus for who he was - the saving Word of the Father. Time and again John witnessed Jesus do and speak exactly like the father in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son: bringing to light the sin of unbelief and disobedience and where it gets people, and then going out of his way to meet the lost, to forgive and heal and restore them to their true home – to the Father heart of God, to sonship!

Nowhere did he see the glory of God's love and mercy more than on the cross where he understood that in going the way of all flesh, Jesus, and in him God, bore our death and so took away the sins of the world and reconciled it to God. He also witnessed that God raised Jesus from the dead and thus showed Christ to be His saving Word, so that all the world is now called to receive Christ and believe in his name and so have the forgiveness of sins and know the Father even as His child.

AMEN

There is an everlasting kindness

There is an everlasting kindness

You lavished on us,

when the radiance of heaven came to rescue the lost.

You called the sheep without a shepherd

to leave their distress,

for Your streams of forgiveness

and the shade of Your rest.

2 And with compassion for the hurting

You reached out Your hand,

as the lame ran to meet You

and the dead breathed again.

You saw behind the eyes of sorrow

and shared in our tears;

heard the sigh of the weary, let the children draw near.

What boundless love, what fathomless grace

You have shown us, O God of compassion.

*Each day we live an offering of praise
as we show to the world Your
compassion.*

3 We stood beneath the cross of Calvary
and gazed on Your face,

at the thorns of oppression and wounds of disgrace;

for surely You have borne our suffering
and carried our grief,

as You pardoned the scoffer

and showed grace to the thief.

What boundless love . . .

4 How beautiful the feet that carry this
gospel of peace

to the fields of injustice and the valleys of need;

to be a voice of hope and healing, to answer the cries

of the hungry and helpless with the mercy of Christ.

What boundless love . . .

Keith and Kristyn Getty / Stuart Townend

Lord God, we thank you for coming into our world through your Son and fulfilling in him, Jesus Christ, your promise of redemption and salvation. He is your mighty Word by which all who hear it, who receive him, know your love and are enfolded in it, receiving grace upon grace, your mighty Word by which you make all things new. Grant us, for his sake, that we may grasp more fully the extent and significance of the truth that through him we are your children and you are our Father in

heaven with whom we belong. Grant us a true sense of our sins so that your mercy and forgiveness in Jesus Christ become to us the light that they are and that makes known to us and the world the praiseworthiness and glory of your name. Help us to let go of all that would dim our eyes and dull our hearts for your grace, and help us to face what comes, whatever the years may bring, with a steady faith, a sure hope and in the love of Christ.

- time of prayer / intercession –

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen'

May the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ shine in your hearts, transform your lives, and brighten the world.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you.

AMEN