



A sermon for the First Sunday after Christmas

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- [Isaiah 61:10-62:3](#)
- [Psalm 148](#)
- [Galatians 4:4-7](#)
- [Luke 2:15-21](#)

I think I can still say 'Happy Christmas!'. It is only two days since we celebrated Christmas, and even if we are not meeting in real time on this first Sunday after Christmas, I hope there is still a sense of excitement reverberating around us. I trust the candles from the advent wreaths, especially the central one representing the light of Christ, can still be lit reminding us symbolically of the presence of the Christ child in our midst. If the Christingles we made survived, we can also relight that candle and share the story with the children in our families. Today's gospel takes us back to the Christmas story. Any new mother will tell you that, apart from the nearest and dearest, very few people will be expected to intrude on the parents' joy. Indeed, I heard a new parent on the news saying how much she liked the fact that COVID-19 prevented them having lots of visitors, therefore allowing her and her partner the privacy that they felt they needed at that time. So, contrast this with Mary and Joseph who are descended on not only by strangers but also by animals. I often wonder what was going through her mind at that time. The shepherds had an experience while doing their normal task – tending the flock. Something spectacular happened. Something that meant they could not just continue with business as usual. "Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about". We are told that when they saw for themselves, they in turn began to spread the news of what they had seen and all who heard it were simply amazed. The coming of the Christ child is meant to distract us from what we are doing. From the ordinary everyday things. Because God is with us. Emmanuel has arrived. The significant moment was a showstopper that would be indelibly printed on the hearts of the whole human race. What was that special moment for you this Christmas?





What was the showstopper that made you stop in your tracks and spend time thinking about the experience you've had and its meaning? Then, did you follow up like the shepherds did? Did you have the sense of "I want to see more, I want to understand what this is all about"? Like the shepherds, meeting the Christ child means that we are never the same again. There is no just going back to normality, the way things were. We cannot unsee what we have seen or unhear what we have heard. We are told that the shepherds could not help themselves – they began sharing the news of what they had heard and what they had seen. Like them, we too have a responsibility to act on our experiences of meeting Christ. We have to renew our commitment to live lives that reflect that we have been with Jesus.

Let me turn to Paul's letter to the church in Galatia. Paul's letter reminds us that when it was the right time God sent his son, born of a woman, so that through him we may enter into a new relationship with the Father where we become sons and daughters. An experience that allows us to have the kind of relationship with God to the extent that we can intimately call out, "Abba, Father, Papa, Daddy". God's timing is the right timing. It may not match ours in terms of convenience, but it is God's time and therefore the right time. Hardly convenient for Mary and Joseph for her to give birth in a stable. But it was God's time. As adopted children of God, we too share the same rights and privileges that come with being a biological child and this comes with responsibilities to live and to act in a manner that reflects that we are, indeed, children of God.

I'm reminded of the story told by Archbishop Sentamu of the candidates being prepared for confirmation. The question is asked of them: in the story of Jesus being baptised, if you recall there was a voice from heaven – what did the voice say? One child popped her hands up: "It said: now that you are a child of God behave like one". We can claim the fact that we are heirs, and if heirs then it means we are no longer slaves, we are no longer bound to repeating acts that destroy our lives. We are changed.

There was a time when Paul would have thought that by virtue of being a Jew he was a special child of God. He was having to face the fact that it had nothing to





do with belonging to a particular ethnic or religious group or tribe. Neither did it have anything to do with wealth. We are children of God because of the initiative taken by God. It is God through his son that teaches us how to claim the inheritance and live as children of God.

This season of Christmas allows us to take stock, to go forward and live afresh what it means to have been in the presence of Christ. At Christmas, the Word comes to us clothed in human flesh – God incarnate, God becoming human. Let us allow the seed of God’s Word to be sewn in our hearts, and let that Word be nurtured in us and become life-giving. Let us see this new life consecrated in service to God and one another.

One of the beautiful things about our brothers and sisters from Africa is that their names mean something. They don’t just give a child a name because a pop star has got that name. One of the young women from my church back in Hackney where I served got married last year - and last month I received the news that she delivered twins. They are called Kammarachi which means "May I know God," and the girl is also called Kelechi – "Thank God". In Isaiah, God’s children are given a new name. You and I are given a new name. This is another sign of being in Christ. Abram becomes Abraham, if you remember, after God’s visitation. Simon’s name is changed – he becomes Peter. Saul becomes Paul after the Damascus road experience. At baptism, you and I are given a new name, a Christian name, symbolic of being created anew by the spirit.

My sisters and brothers, we are daughters and sons of God - heirs. We have been given a new name. Let us not return to what we have always known or doing what we have always done. Let us instead discern what The Spirit is saying to us this Christmas. And let us, like the shepherds, commit to living new lives. Let us, like the shepherds, say these words: come let us go and see this new thing that has come to pass. What is this new thing that has come to pass in your life this Christmas? Come, let us go, let us see this new thing, and having seen it, let us share it. Just remember that you and I will never be the same again when we have met the Christ child. May God bless you during this season of Christmas.

Amen.

