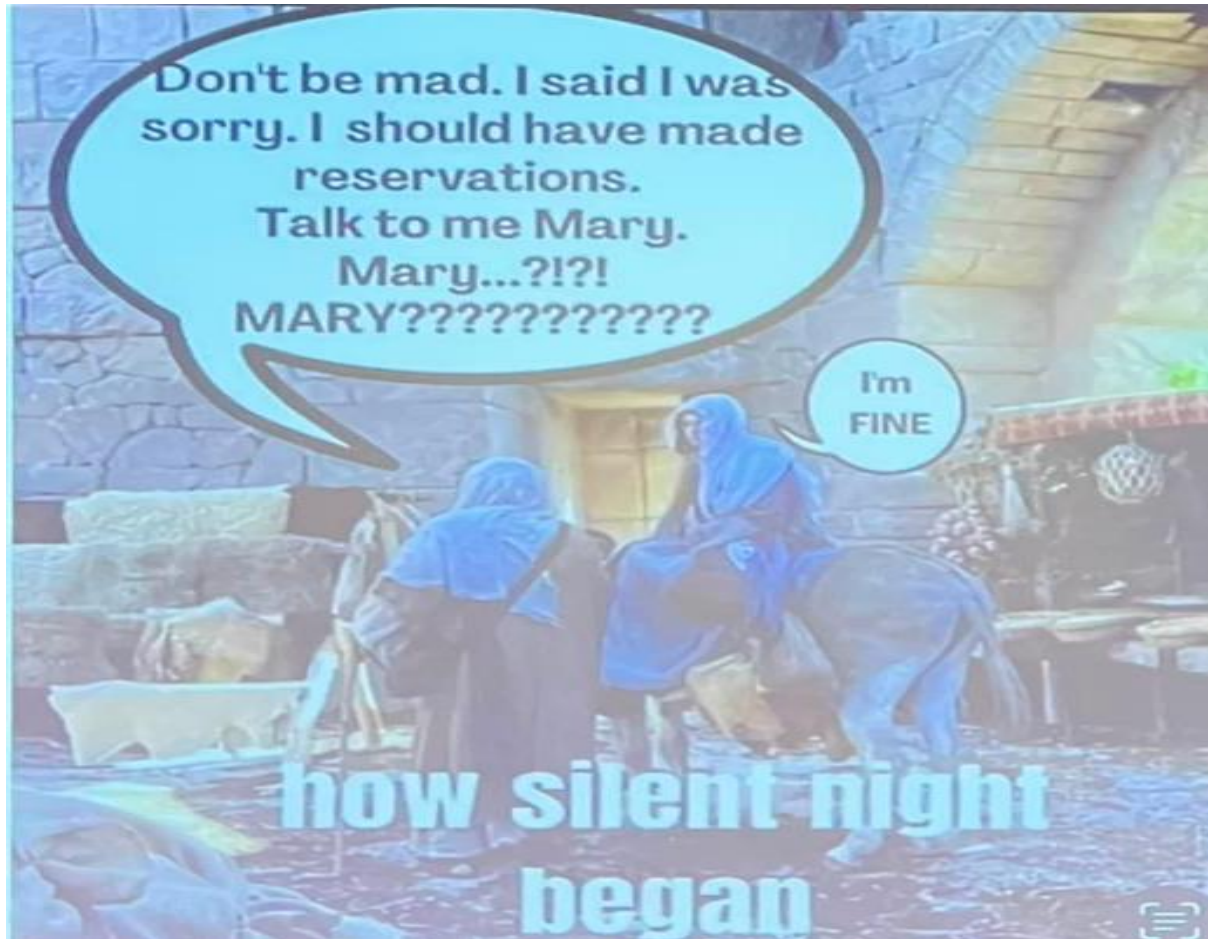


**Holy Trinity Sunningdale**  
**Monday, December 25, 2023 (Christmas Day)**  
**Reading – Luke 2:1-20 “Unexpected Gift”**

Merry Christmas Everyone!

Israel was expecting a Messiah but not like the Messiah that came. In our reading today, some unexpected things happened.



It was expected that all Israel be registered for tax purposes. It was expected that Joseph go from Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. Mary also goes with him. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the Inn.

But some things that were unexpected also happened. The shepherds of Bethlehem were watching their flock at night, “an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them”. The appearance of an angel to a bunch of shepherds in a field — that’s unexpected!

Then the angel made an unexpected announcement, “Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you, he is the Messiah, the Lord”. The child is not only a Saviour, but the Messiah and the Lord! Yet, born in a stable “you will find a child lying in a manger” — that’s surely unexpected!

Do you ever find it astonishing that, of all the ways in which God could have saved humanity, he chose, in his wisdom, to send a baby. Not a man. Not a soldier and not a king. But an infant, helpless, susceptible to all of the harms of the world. I have

always wondered why. As Christmas draws near I find myself asking, why did Jesus come as a baby—small and defenceless?

From a theological perspective, there are many reasons why Christ came as an infant. But, I like to think Jesus came to earth as a helpless baby because babies represent life. Newness. Hope. The future. A second chance. A new beginning. Opportunity. Freshness. Tomorrow and far beyond. What better way for God to give the gift of salvation and eternal life, but through a baby who represents new life!

I love that Jesus came as a baby and not in a cloud of smoke and fire. I am thankful that Jesus was willing to walk in my shoes and experience the normal life we each lead, tempted by the flesh, but choosing to serve God. I am thankful for the Babe, lying in the manger, who changed everything.

But why did Jesus have to become human? My answer to that is two-fold. As the God-Man, Jesus mediates God to humans. But as the Man-God, Jesus represents humans to God.

If I want to know what God is like, I look at Jesus. I see his gentleness with the woman caught in the act of adultery as he forgives her and tells her to "Go and sin no more." I see his patience for a short man in a sycamore tree as he looks up and says to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." I see his healing touch when he takes a blind man by the hand and leads him to a solitary place; takes some of his own spit and anoints the man's eyes making him see. I see his love for the alienated and the marginalised as he touches lepers and heals them.

On the other hand, if I want to know how God feels about things or what is on God's mind, I listen to Jesus. I learn that God doesn't want me to live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from his mouth. I learn God's righteous indignation as Jesus takes a whip and chases the moneychangers out of the temple declaring, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." I learn that God expects me to forgive seventy times seven times when my brother sins against me. As a man, God knows by experience what it means to be human. Because of Jesus, I know God "feels me."

The writer of Hebrews, in chapter 4:15-16 says, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." Jesus knows what it feels like to be human, so he stands before God the Father as my advocate. 1 Tim 2:5 says, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."

There is the story of a father putting his four-year-old son to bed. Having finished prayers and stories, he kissed his son and turned the light off. Almost immediately his son started crying, "Don't leave me. I'm scared and I don't want to stay here alone."

The father tried to encourage the little boy by reminding him that they had just had devotions and God's presence was with him. To this the little boy said, "I want somebody with skin on."

This is why we celebrate Christmas. This is the great message of the Incarnation! God coming in the flesh! Emmanuel – God with us!

Dolapo Ogunbawo