

Children of God

Isaiah 52:7-10; John 1:1-14

Some time ago I came across this poem by Steve Turner:

Christmas is really
For the children.
Especially for children
Who like animals, stables,
Stars and babies wrapped
In swaddling clothes.
Then there are wise men,
Kings in fine robes,
Humble shepherds and a
Hint of rich perfume.

Easter is not really
For children
Unless accompanied by a
Cream filled egg.
It has whips, blood, nails,
A spear and allegations
Of body snatching.
It involves politics, God
And the sins of the world.
It is not good for people
Of a nervous disposition.
They would do better to
Think on rabbits, chickens
And the first snowdrop
Of spring.
Or they'd do better to
Wait for a re-run of
Christmas without asking
Too many questions about
What Jesus did when He grew up
Or whether there's any connection.

In a world still shaken by the impact of an Indonesian tsunami, and the tragedies of Brexit and Yemen and Ukraine and Mexican walls, and a dozen other places, I suspect the globe could do with a bit of TLC and people given a chance, even for a brief space, to find respite.

It is why this time around Christmas, with the services on Christmas Eve, crackling with anticipation, and this service on Christmas morning, remains so special to me. In this sacred space, this sanctuary, we can pause even for a moment to draw breath. We can draw breath amidst all the preparations and excitement, all the stress and expectations, all the things we find

wondrous about Christmas, and all the things that make it difficult for some, but we can draw breath this morning.

We can draw breath and wonder again. Wonder at the many stories woven around the time when God visited earth and gave us the gift of His Son. We can draw breath and wonder what this means for us, and for the communities in which we live, and the world we still call home.

And we can reflect on the poetry of John's Gospel speaking of the Word made flesh, and wonder what it means to be given the power to be children of God. It's an odd phrase. "But to all who received Him, who believed in His Name, *He gave power to become children of God.*"

It's a threshold poem, crossing over from what *was* to what has *become*.

I conduct lots of service in the run-up to Christmas, but two of my favourites are the services held here in Church for our Baby and Toddlers groups. The services barely last ten minutes. We sing some carols, there's a short reading and some reflective prayers and a very short talk. But what gets to me every time is when the little darlings, who have been running wild in the St Matthew Hall, are brought into Church. Some are carried, some walk, but they come through from the Hall into this space, the biggest space they have ever been inside. And as they come through that wooden door, they are confronted by the tree, and the decorations, and some soft music, and the lights. The effect on most of them is the same. Awe. Little children experience awe, and for a moment there is stillness. They find themselves enveloped by something that is bigger than they are, and it stills them.

And that is what Christmas is. It may come and go. Some lose it or walk away from it in adult lives, but most of us still experience with it. On this Christmas Day the gift of Jesus gives us the power to become children of God all over again.

In itself it is only a start, a reminder, a suggestion, but it remains an invitation to take that gift of awe, wonder, stillness, and to know that we take it with us not only throughout childhood but in to our adult years. We take it because we need it. The country needs it. The world needs it.

We take it to work with it and to use it and to share it. The holy gift gives us power to become children of God, and accompany the Christ-child from Bethlehem, to Egypt, to Nazareth, to

Jerusalem. From crib to lakeside to hillside to village and town and synagogue and Temple to a Table with bread and wine, to a cross on a lonely hill, to a garden in the cold light of dawn and an empty tomb where once more we can experience the awe and wonder of God still with us, made flesh.

Christmas really is a time for children, children of God. Easter is a time for children, children of God. For in that family of children we find our faith and our hope and our love. We find our forgiveness and we find our salvation. In Christmas, and in Easter, the children of God find Jesus. Let it be so for you.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen