

## The Almighty Baby. Dec. 2023

Let me take you back a few years!

It was the end of the Christmas term. That long term... with many extras to fit in!!

The Nativity Play... and all the rehearsals!  
The Carol Concert... and all the practices!  
The Christmas Parties... and all the preparation!

And then there were the Christmas Cards and the Calendars to make... with all the glue... and the glitter!!

So... by the last week of term my creative brain had all but shut down!

I could think of nothing more imaginative than to ask my class of 7 year olds... to write their own account of what happened that first Christmas... Yes... I know!!

It is always lovely to read the stories children write... they are so fresh, so honest, so uncompromising with the truth.

“Jesus was an Almighty Baby” ... This is what 7 year old Anne- Marie had written!

“Jesus was an Almighty Baby!” I read it over several times.

I was amazed and delighted. And after brushing aside my first, rather irreverent image, of Jesus weighing in at around 11 and a half pounds... I recognised that Anne-Marie had got it right!

Jesus WAS an Almighty Baby... but not just AN Almighty Baby... He was... THE Almighty Baby.

The baby lying in the manger WAS the Almighty... He was Emmanuel... God with us!!

He was the God who had come down to live among us... to get His hands dirty, To experience the messiness of our lives, the mistakes we make... and the regrets we have.

He came to experience all that life could throw at Him.  
To experience the joy of weddings and of meals eaten together with friends.  
He came to experience the pain of exclusion; and the sorrow of illness and death.

And He came to show the world how things could be changed, how things could be put right with eyes that looked at things differently;  
With eyes full of compassion, love and peace.

And it is this 'Almighty Baby' that we have met in our Gospel reading this morning.

And we have met others involved in the story of the 'Almighty Baby.'

We have met a group of marginalised, excluded shepherds,  
Doing what they always did... out in the fields... day and night...  
Taking care of the sheep in their charge.

These were a group, doing an important job... providing lambs for temple worship... and yet they were largely ignored and undervalued.  
As long as the lambs kept coming... that was all that mattered.

But these shepherds were not ignored, nor undervalued that particular night!

Rather they were the chosen ones!! Chosen to be the first to receive the Good News of a Saviour's birth, and to be the first to visit and welcome the newborn child.

Our nativity plays often have the shepherds carrying gifts for the child... a lamb usually... or a small musical instrument.  
Perhaps they did... perhaps not. We can't know.

But what we can know is that they took what they could.

They took their gift of trust... Trusting that what the angels had told them was true.

They took their gift of believing that when they got to the place... they would be made welcome... something which did not normally happen to them.

And they took with them their gift of hope... that the child they would see would indeed be the longed for Messiah.

And they in turn received their gift from the Child... of lives forever changed by their experience... of lives forever carrying the Child Jesus in their hearts.

For the shepherds then, Christmas would be forever... Christmas would be 'always.'

But what about us... by us I do mean us here, but also our society or indeed the world?

Is there a sense that we treat Jesus as a Christmas visitor, with no more commitment to Him than that?

It can feel that each year we hurtle towards Christmas Day... that one particular, special day... and then it's all over!

You may have heard that as you wait in the checkout queue buying your party food for New Year (as I have), 'Well, that's it then for another year! But is it?

Many of you will have seen the slogan displayed on the rear windows of some cars... A dog is for life... not just for Christmas. I would like to suggest that we hold onto a modification of the slogan to read... 'Jesus is for life... not just for Christmas.'

At this point, I have to confess that it feels quite difficult to share a message of Christmas trees, baubles, tinsel, lavish food, presents... Joy, peace, and love... In light of the many situations of conflict, violence, injury, and death happening in various parts of the world at present...

And the situations of homelessness, loneliness, despair, and hopelessness we see in our own neighbourhoods. How does Christmas speak into all this?

In addressing this... let me share a little story... little girl... own room... first night... getting dark... Mummy, Mummy... I'm coming... God loves you and will protect you... yes I know that... but right now I need someone with skin on!!

And that is Christmas! God... with skin on! Meeting the needs on earth.

It's God with skin on in the form of those many people, who respond in whatever way they can to the cries of those in desperate need...

All the aid agencies and government ministers responding to secure humanitarian aid, as well as working to secure the release of hostages and bring an end to hostilities... all these are God... With skin on!

And it's all the 'ordinary' people running food, clothing and toy banks to bring whatever comfort and support they can to those in need... it's these who are God... with skin on... making a difference.

So, this, I believe, is the way the message of Christmas can speak into every situation... With compassion and love... with hope... and with the possibility of better things to come!

Happy Christmas everyone!  
Amen.