

Not far from where I grew up, to the South West of Birmingham lies the village of Alvechurch. Not much would distinguish this village from several surrounding villages apart from the fact that this village was the inspiration of the village of Ambridge. This village, well known to followers of *'The Archers'*, a long running radio soap, often referred to as 'an everyday story of country folk'. It told the story of the goings on of different characters in a village community. Periodically issues affecting the wider world, be they wars, Royal weddings or divorces, foot and mouth would impact on the lives of those who gathered in the 'The Bull' for a pint.

Our Gospel reading this Christmas time from St Luke's Gospel begins:

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

It is an every day story of country folk, shepherds doing what shepherds do. In the Gospel this everyday story is interrupted by the announcement of the heavenly host of the birth of the long awaited Messiah. It is a story of the divine breaking through into everyday life and routines.

That, at its heart, is what the Incarnation is about. In the Gospel accounts the birth of Jesus, in his life, his teaching, his healing, his death and resurrection we are presented with an image of God breaking through into our world. Not into some abstract, philosophical world, but into the world in which people live. And so he comes to fishermen mending their nets, to tax collector, to a woman drawing water at a well, to a family celebrating a marriage, to sisters mourning the death of a brother, to a Roman governor beaten but unbowed. He comes into a world where people love and hate, where we dream and are

disappointed, in which we hope and fear. He is present in the homeless shelters, the alleyways, the hospitals and prisons of our society, both in those who serve and those who are served. He is in the world in which we work, we play, we rest; the world into which we are born, and in which we live and die.

He comes into the world, but does he come into our lives? Going back to the Gospel reading; we are told that the shepherds not only saw and heard the angelic host, they acted on what they had seen and heard, leaving their flocks to see the child that had been born. The Incarnation, God coming among us, cannot leave us untouched. It is an invitation to embark upon a journey of a lifetime, a journey of faith in fellowship with him whose birth we celebrate at this time. This is a journey in which his teaching, his life, his death and resurrection impacts on every aspect of our lives, our work and leisure, our relationships with one another. What we are talking of here is ordinary lives becoming extraordinary lives, in which and through which Christ becomes living and active in the world of today. Or, as John says in the opening chapter of his Gospel:

¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. *John 1:11ff*

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God. I think of that old prayer that reminds us:

He became like us so that we might become more like him.

Well what is he, who is he? In the words of that often misunderstood former Bishop of Durham, Dr David Jenkins, ‘Jesus is the face of God towards us’. In

him we encounter God. In the poverty of his birth he reveals the majesty and power of God. In him we experience the power, the peace, the reconciling, self forgetting, self emptying love of God for all mankind.

He became like us so that we might become like him. So who do we think we are? Through him, in fellowship with him we are ones called to show something of the love of God as revealed to us in the coming of his Son, to be the hands, the feet, the eyes, the lips of Christ in the world in which we are placed, to be living effectual signs of his reconciling, redeeming love in our homes, our places of work and recreation.

^{Jn 1:14} And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

May we who celebrate the birth of Christ be living signs of his presence in the world of today, may others see something of his glory in our lives.