



SUNDAY 2 JANUARY 2022

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

Feast of the Holy Family (C): Luke 2: 41-52

How many stories we heard and learnt as kids began, 'Once upon a time?' It excuses us from exact dates. It's a good way to kick off any adventure. But as the song says 'Let's start at the very beginning. It's a very good place to start'.

St John does that. The opening words to his Gospel take us to a place and time before there ever was a place or time. You can't get any earlier than the very beginning. 'In the beginning', he tells us, 'was the Word' - a message, a statement, a communication. Except this wasn't a spoken sound but a person. The Word was God and still is.

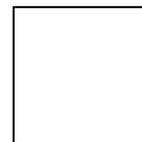
John has to tell us. He's full of this - overwhelmed and delighted at having met and known Jesus, God's living Word to the world, a vibrant, walking message of love. He needs to share it. He's excited about it. He wants us to be excited too.

We are so used to hearing the story of Jesus, familiarity can dull our appreciation. John wants to share his amazement with us, his sense of wonder is on overdrive at the heady privilege to have lived closely with his God. This is the Lord of creation who made the radical and frankly daring decision to enter into human time. This Word, John tells us - became flesh - became one of us, and came into the world a red faced, helpless baby, born to a young teenage mother. You couldn't make it up!

John deliberately starts his Gospel to mirror the opening words of the book of Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth'.

The awesome reality John wants to emphatically tell us is that Jesus, son of Mary, lived among them. They ate together, were taught by him, they laughed and sang and cried with him. They were fascinated and mystified by him. No one spoke like he did. They now know that Mary's son was God's Son also. John knows him as love personified - gentle and humble of heart. He saw Jesus' love for people was open and warm, inviting and yet challenging to be copied.

We've celebrated Jesus' birth by marking our affection for those we love. It's a good start. A beginning. Take John's word for it - God was in the beginning. We make many new beginnings. We have to. God will be in our beginnings too. You're never on your own. The Word still lives among us, made flesh and shining in the faces and lives of many people very familiar to us. Read St John - slowly - you too will be amazed.



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Pope Francis speaking of love

The spiritual stature of a person's life is measured by love, which in the end remains the criterion for the definitive decision about a human life's worth or lack thereof. Yet some believers think that it consists in the imposition of their own ideologies upon everyone else, or in a violent defence of the truth, or in impressive, demonstrations of strength. All of us, as believers, need to recognise that love takes first place, love must never be put at risk, and the greatest danger lies in failing to love (Corinthians 13:1-13).

Saint Thomas Aquinas sought to describe the love made possible by God's grace as a movement outwards towards another, whereby we consider the beloved as somehow united to ourselves. Our affection for others makes us freely desire to seek their good. All this originates in a sense of esteem, an appreciation of the value of the other. This is ultimately the idea behind the word 'charity', those who are loved are 'dear' to me, they are considered of great value. And the love whereby someone becomes pleasing to another is the reason why the latter bestows something on him freely.

Love, then, is more than just a series of benevolent actions. Those actions have their source in a union increasingly directed towards others, considering them of value, worthy, pleasing and beautiful apart from their physical or moral appearances. Our love for others, for who they *are*, moves us to seek the best for their lives. Only by cultivating this way of relating to one another will we make possible a social friendship that excludes no one and a fraternity that is open to all.

- *Fratelli Tutti* paras 92-94