



SUNDAY 25 DECEMBER 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

The Feast of Christmas 2022

'Are you ready for Christmas?' It's a question I'm asked a few times every year. Usually I don't feel ready. I can have cards done and sent, presents sought, bought and wrapped, but can still feel I haven't dwelt sufficiently on celebrating Jesus' coming among us. Christmas happens on 25 December every year and I still get caught out for being short of time.

Can I ever be truly ready? Is there a point where I recognise I've got the message all sewn up, understood and complete like one of my wrapped presents? I think not. In fact it's foolish to imagine that I can even get near the full mystery of God's love - not this side of the grave anyway, and probably not perfectly on the other side either.

We all know the story - or stories, because there are two versions of the Christmas story in our Scriptures from Matthew and Luke - we tend to weave them both together. Our Gospel writers tempt us to glimpse God's stunning work through their skilful crafting of the stories. You and I couldn't have imagined things happening this way. But why should we expect God to do things our way? He's smashed our imagination by what he's chosen to do.

God becomes a helpless baby born to a teenage mother - really! Where's the ostentatious trimmings or even the subtle signals of greatness here? Birth and death stories - beginnings and endings are always important - but they never end. The wonder and the pulling power new babies generate is amazing and the cost and grief of loss likewise make big claims on the human heart.

Our God walked and worked among the people of Galilee and beyond. The full truth of his presence was not understood, though he impressed and disturbed people in equal measure. This continues in our day too. The stories of Jesus' death and resurrection were probably the first of the Gospel narratives to be written, the events were so startling. It led people to ask 'So what was his earlier life like? What was he like as a youngster?' The stories of his birth are mostly all we have of his time before he went public. It's tantalisingly brief.

We continue to tell the stories, act out and sing about the stories. Can we also hope that in our re-visiting these inspiring and humbling writings, we'll be touched once again to think about an almighty God, lover of ordinary people who have all the troubles, human prejudices and foibles under the sun. More than that - he has entrusted us to love the same imperfect folks who live in our streets and in our homes. Imagine that - and feel important.

May the Christmas story in 2022 help you to know how much you are loved. Happy Christmas!



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Pope Francis on Communal Commitment

It is not the task of the Pope to offer a detailed and complete analysis of contemporary reality, but I do exhort all the communities to an 'ever watchful scrutiny of the signs of the times'. This is in fact a grave responsibility, since certain present realities, unless effectively dealt with, are capable of setting off processes of dehumanization which would then be hard to reverse. We need to distinguish clearly what might be a fruit of the kingdom from what runs counter to God's plan. This involves not only recognizing and discerning spirits, but also - and this is decisive - choosing movements of the spirit of good and rejecting those of the spirit of evil. I take for granted the different analyses which other documents of the universal magisterium have offered, as well as those proposed by the regional and national conferences of bishops. In this Exhortation I claim only to consider briefly, and from a pastoral perspective, certain factors which can restrain or weaken the impulse of missionary renewal in the Church, either because they threaten the life and dignity of God's people or because they affect those who are directly involved in the Church's institutions and in her work evangelization.

- *The Joy of the Gospel* - para 51