

‘Wrapped in our Humanity’ – A Homily for Midnight Mass

One of my favourite books as a young boy was C S Lewis’ *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. When the children first walk through the wardrobe into the magical world of Narnia, they find it to be a world trapped in Winter under the spell of the White Witch. This is an eternal winter, frozen in fear and despair, with no expectation that things might be different. “Always winter, but never Christmas” as Mr Tumnus the faun tells Lucy when they first meet in the woods of Narnia.

Sometimes I wonder whether this can be the case in our lives. Sometimes we might feel trapped by other’s expectations, or weighed down by guilt over past actions, paralysed by the fear of what the future might hold, stymied by political narratives of cynicism and suspicion. And yet with the coming of those children to Narnia, something wonderful happens. The ice begins to melt. And one of the first signs of the dawn of a new age is the sound of sleigh-bells. Not the menacing sounds of the White Witch’s approach, but the sound of Santa’s sleigh. Christmas heralds the thawing out of Narnia, the approach of hope, the promise of something new. “I’ve come at last,” says Father Christmas, “she has kept me out for a long time, but I have got in at last. Aslan is on the move. The Witch’s magic is weakening.”

And so it is for us. Christmas is about the birth of new hope. A hope born in a tiny little child, a child who holds in his humanity all the promise, mystery and joy of God. The birth of this child is the thawing out of a world once frozen by fear, world once trapped in despair, a world once locked in anxiety, for it is the birth of God in our world. And so tonight is a night for expectancy, for excitement, for breathless wonder as something radically new emerges in our midst. Tonight is a night for the cynicism of the other days of the year to melt away. Tonight is a night for the poetry of heaven to touch the prose of our lives. Tonight is the dawn of summer joy in a world caught in wintery darkness.

The Gospel – the Good News of the Incarnation – is the greatest gift ever given: the gift of God himself, erupting into our world, pouring into our flesh, and becoming one with us.

This Good News is that God shares our fears, our hungers, our challenges, but also our joys, our hopes and our loves.

The thawing out of our world: God in Christ, content to be a wordless child, content to be an Asylum Seeker in Egypt, content to reach out to touch the untouchable, content to be the scandalous offer of life that proved too much for a violent and disordered world, content to be the one who finally dies upon the wood of the cross. This God in Jesus, the perfect shape of love, the distant sound of sleigh-bells heralding something new and exciting, the birth of a new world. The gift given tonight is perfectly wrapped, for it is wrapped in humanity, wrapped in humility, wrapped in love.

And what is our response to be? Michael Mayne, the former dean of Westminster puts it perfectly: 'to stretch out our hands to God as trustingly as a child receiving a present at Christmas and receive from him the gift of our Saviour.' AMEN.