

# In the Beginning



Bible Notes on Genesis and  
John  
October - December 2012

50p

October 1<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 1 v1

*In the Beginning God*

That is where we have to start from. Children sometimes ask, “Well, who made God?” The only possible answer is, “No one made God.” God simply is. God is the only “simply is”. Everything else that there is is created by God – sun, moon and stars, the earth, all living things, human beings, spiritual beings such as angels and demons, abstracts like love, justice, hope, reason, wisdom, beauty and faith. Everything that exists is God’s creation, except for God Himself Who simply is. Pagans may have worshipped (and perhaps still do) the sun, moon and stars or trees, rocks and springs. Rationalists may worship reason. Misguided people worship angels. Very many people worship money, power and celebrity. Far too many of us effectively worship ourselves. The people of God, however, worship God alone. *Thou shalt have no other gods before me.* The people of God, far from worshipping created things, exhort all creation to join in our praises. *O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise him and magnify him together.*

October 2<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 1v1

*In the Beginning God*

Granted that God alone exists in Himself and that He is the origin of everything else that is, it follows that God cannot be an irrelevance or an afterthought, an optional extra in our lives, when we have dealt with all the concrete realities of earning a living, bringing up a family, participating in leisure activities, etc. If God alone is in Himself and all of our life, all of our existence, depends on Him, then we live in the context of God. St Paul quotes approvingly the pagan Greek poet who observed that *in him we live and move and have our being.*

If God is, then He is everything. If God is not, then He is nothing. We are either the people of God with *all our hearts, souls and minds and strength* or we are not the people of God at all. It is a misplaced missionary strategy that plays down the degree of commitment God requires of us. *Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.*

October 3<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 1 v1

*In the Beginning God*

There is good evidence that human beings have always known this. Palaeo-archaeology reveals that for as long as human beings have been capable of leaving artefacts which we can interpret – cave paintings, burial customs, etc. – we have been religious. At least for as long as human beings have been sufficiently rational to create a culture which leaves a record of its beliefs in its buildings, its art and its writing, it has seemed reasonable to human beings to believe in God.

Sceptics rightly point out that religion has been and still is the cause of many terrible wars and other gross wrong-doing. It is not religion which is at fault, however. It is false religion. There is very little in the Bible about the challenge of atheism (which some would argue is a peculiarity of one or two human societies {including our own} and an anomaly in the mass of human cultures of which an overwhelming majority are religious). Atheism is not the problem. The problem is false religion. The prophets preach against those who oppress the poor, cheat their customers, persecute foreigners, neglect widows and orphans, etc., not because of their lack of religion, but because of their false religion. Sinners act the way they do either because they worship the false gods of gold and silver, etc., or because, while they claim to worship the LORD, they do not in fact keep His commandments. They go to temple, synagogue or church. They may well pray and even read the Bible. But they don't obey God's perfect law of love. In effect they put themselves first, as, of course, do atheists, agnostics and others who refuse to surrender their lives to the One Who made them. *In the Beginning God*. But Who is God? What is God like? *God is love* and the people of God are people of love.

October 4<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v1

*In the Beginning God*

This is why we pray, *Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid*. This is the reality in which we live. So we pray, *Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

October 5<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v1

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

According to the Epistle to the Hebrews (11 v3) *Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.* I think this is a way of expressing the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, that God created everything out of nothing. It seems reasonable to us as human beings that everything is made by someone or is made out of something or that it owes its existence to what was there before. In our experience, this is the way the world is. It seems reasonable to us, therefore, that the universe was created by Someone or Something. It is reasonable, but we can't prove it. By faith we know God. It is reasonable that God is. It is far more reasonable that God is than that God is not. We know God through faith. Faith and reason are not contradictory as so many people seem to suggest. Faith is not clinging onto a belief which is irrational or unlikely. Faith and reason are complementary ways of approaching the Truth. Faith and reason are the gifts of God to us. Some people speak as if faith were only for children and for immature or uneducated adults who don't know any better. Sometimes I am afraid we seem to go along with this view, apologetic about what we believe, dumbing down our preaching and presentation of the Gospel. We shouldn't be ashamed or apologetic to believe. Faith makes sense. With the psalmist we can say, *The fool hath said in his heart: there is no God* – one of the few references to atheism in the whole of the Bible. Maybe that's why Jesus says it is so dangerous to call your brother man a fool.

October 6<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v2

Most modern scientists go along with the Big Bang Theory of the origin of the universe. The idea is basically that there was nothing – no energy, no matter, no space, not even time. And then everything sprang into being in an instant, at a point. Ever since then everything has been expanding and coalescing to form stars and planets, on at least one of which conditions have developed conducive to the emergence of conscious life. This theory seems to fit in very well with the Christian belief that God Who exists in Himself outside space and in eternity creates time and space at everything which exists within time and space.

October 7<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v2

Yesterday's account looks very attractive. It would, however, be a mistake to tie our beliefs about God, our faith in Him, to any particular scientific theory. The discovery of new evidence or deeper consideration of the existing evidence and theories may well lead scientists away from the Big Bang Theory. Men like Stephen Hawking are developing ideas about how the Big Bang could have natural causes. They consider it possible that physicists might one day be able to explain the Big Bang in terms which do not require the hypothesis that God exists and that He is the Creator of heaven and earth.

This creates a problem for us Christians only if we have hitched our understanding of God as Creator to that one particular scientific theory, the Big Bang. The Christian doctrine of Creation is not so much about how or when things came into being (questions for science) but that everything that exists depends for its existence on God, which science can neither prove nor disprove. God is not a God of the Gaps Whom we call in only to explain things that we can't otherwise explain. God exists in and through everything. He is the ultimate cause and the final purpose of all that exists. We are not, therefore, afraid that the advance of human knowledge will leave less and less space in our thinking for God until there is no room left for Him. On the contrary, the more we can understand of the universe, the greater our understanding of the greatness of its Creator.

October 8<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v3

*And God said, let there be light: and there was light.*

I promise I'll move on from science after today! When you use a gallon of petrol in your car, the amount of gases and water vapour and the small amount of soot coming out of the exhaust pipe will be exactly the same mass as the petrol you put in, plus the oxygen which has combined with it in its combustion. The chemical energy in the petrol will be exactly the same number of Calories as comes out to turn the wheels, to overcome friction, to raise the temperature in the radiator and to produce a small amount of noise. In the C19 scientist believed that energy could be neither created nor destroyed and that matter could be neither created nor destroyed, only converted. So petrol (which is

largely carbon and hydrogen) combines with oxygen when it burns and is converted (if it's pure and burnt properly) into carbon dioxide and water. The energy in the chemical bonds which hold the carbon and hydrogen atoms together in petrol is converted into heat which heats up the engine and forces the gases to expand, thereby propelling the piston, which in turn turns the wheels.

In a nuclear submarine, however, some of the mass in the fuel is lost. It turns into energy according to Einstein's famous equation  $E=mc^2$ . Mass is lost, not conserved. New energy is created. What has been discovered is that mass (matter) and energy (light) are not two different things, but just different aspects of the same thing and, in the right conditions (e.g. a nuclear reactor), one can be transformed into the other. (I guess the Higgs' boson comes into it somewhere!)

So, despite what we said yesterday, it is interesting that light is the first thing God creates. This would fit in with the Big Bang Theory, but I don't withdraw my warning that Genesis isn't trying to lay out the path for physics. I do stick to the point, however, that the more we can understand of the universe, the greater our understanding of the greatness of its Creator and that's my excuse for this day's meditation.

October 9<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v4

*And God saw the light that it was good.*

This is a recurrent theme in the creation story. The creation is good because the Creator is good. What spoils Creation is when the created goes against the grain of creation. On at least one of the planets conditions have developed conducive to the emergence of conscious life. That's us. We have free will. If we were not free to withhold our love from God then our love would be much less valuable to Him. But because we do choose to withhold our love from God we spoil the Creation. God made the world good. We're the ones who mess it up. *Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name. Amen.*

October 10<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v4

*And God divided the light from the darkness.*

Division is another theme of the creation story, the distinction between heaven and earth, the separation of the waters and the dry land. Later on in the Bible, of course, light and darkness become potent symbols of good and evil. Perhaps it is fanciful, but thinking about our meditation on Monday, if light in the creation story stands for all that is, energy/matter, God's creation which is always good, then darkness stands maybe stands for the negative, what is not, what is not of God. Some theologians have attempted to deal with the so-called problem of evil along these lines. The problem of evil is that if God is infinitely good and infinitely powerful how can there be any evil in the world at all? One answer is that evil does not really exist – that evil is simply the absence of good, just as darkness is the absence of light. It's a good theory, but handle it with care. You can't deny the reality of suffering. What is clear, however, is that Jesus is the Light of the World. The people of God are the sons of light. The Church, the Body of Christ, *is the light of the world, A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

October 11<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v5

*And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.*

I'm quite a stickler for time. My days are marked out by the time I get up and go to bed, meal times, the times I go to church. Between those times hours are allocated for pastoral work, time spent on the computer, taking Max out, gardening, etc. I'm probably too set in my ways and I get quite stressed if my timetable is disrupted by unexpected difficulties or by people who don't keep appointments. Some people are much more relaxed about time, but I find it difficult to imagine anyone, even the most laid back, being unaffected by the daily rhythms of light and dark, hunger and eating, jobs to be done, which take a particular time. Time is so much part of our existence on earth and the Bible sees the daily and seasonal rhythms as God's gift to us. The biblical concept of time having a beginning an end is much more hopeful than the alternative – a never ending cycle, one thing after another.

October 12<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 6-8

God creates heaven as well as earth, angels as well as material beings. Sometimes the word “heaven” is used to mean sky or the space which lies beyond it. Sometimes the word “heaven” is used to mean an entirely different dimension, the place where maybe we think of God and His holy angels and the saints in light as dwelling. But we have to be careful. The Bible well knows that even heaven cannot contain God. It talks about heaven as well as earth passing away. It’s not surprising that these things are confusing. We are talking here about things which are beyond human understanding. If we are dogmatically insistent on any ideas we might conceive of heaven we are in danger of making an image, something less than God which it is blasphemous to worship. We can only have icons – depictions which point to a reality infinitely greater than themselves.

As we said yesterday, we value our lives in this world of time and space. Time and space provide the boundaries within which we live and the direction in which we are travelling. It is not an infinite cycle of one thing after another as the wheel of time just keeps on turning. We have a beginning and an end. Jesus is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of our lives as well as of the universe. Time and space and the boundaries they provide are the gift of God to us material, temporal beings. Yet we believe that our end in Christ is eternity. What can that mean for us? It is too wonderful to contemplate.

October 13<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 9-13

One of the parts of our A level Biology course was the variety of life. We looked at the different families of plants and animals, things living on dry land and in rivers and oceans, creatures too small for the human eye to see, the different ways in which they feed themselves, grow and reproduce, the incredibly beautiful and the grotesque, the wonderful and the disgusting. *O all ye Works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise him and magnify him for ever.* The more we know about the world, the more reasons we have for praising God. (Incidentally our Biology master was an atheist as well as being a very nice man. I remember his mild shock when I quoted Psalm 14 in an assembly I led, *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God,* but I still stand by it.)



October 14<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 14-19

We think of the stars as the source of light. Especially the sun (our nearest star) is the source of most of the light on earth. The moon is a giant reflector of the sun's light in our direction. The Genesis story, however, put the creation of light three days before the creation of the heavenly bodies which provide us with light. That too fits in with Big Bang Theory if you think that is helpful. Energy (light) comes into being and then coalesces into the mass which aggregates to form stars which in turn break down some of their own mass in nuclear reactions to generate more heat and light which warm up and illuminate otherwise lifeless planets such as our earth. In the Genesis story the focus of the "lights" in heaven is that they mark the passage of time, the calendar which regulates human activity and records the working out of God's providence – night and day; the weekly Sabbath; seedtime and harvest; Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles; Christmas, Easter, Whitsun and Trinity. Insofar as time is the gift of God, time is potentially sacred. Time is consecrated as we thank God for what He has done in time, as we devote our time to obeying His commandments, as we mark the day, the week and the year with daily prayer, the Sunday Eucharist and our celebrations of our Lord's Birth, Death and Resurrection. Pagans may have worshipped the sun, moon and stars. Perhaps astrologers still do. The people of God recognise that these heavenly bodies are God's creation and exhort them to join with us in worshipping Him. *O ye Sun, and Moon, bless ye the Lord: praise him and magnify him for ever. O ye Stars of Heaven, bless ye the Lord: praise him and magnify him for ever.* (Incidentally these quotations come from the Benedicite Omnia Opera, a canticle used in Morning Prayer, where you can find it after the Te Deum and before the NT lesson.)

October 15<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 20-23

Once when my mother and I were on a cruise, quite a lot of the passengers went out in small boats looking for whales (to watch not to harpoon). My mother went to her cabin and I jogged around the deck. I was delighted to see a whale come up alongside our ship even though the whale watchers hadn't see any. It is right to be in awe of God's Creation, to marvel and to recognise that we are stewards.

October 16<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv 24&25

A friend of mine left the Medway towns to become self-sufficient in a small-holding on the hills on the Yorkshire Lancashire border. One day she and I were looking out at the cattle on the surrounding fells and she was inspired to quote Psalm 50 v10: *For all the beasts of the forest are mine: and so are the cattle upon a thousand hills.* I often think of that when I am walking or running in the countryside around here and see the cattle in the fields, especially around Luddesdowne where they are indeed on the hillside. Everything does in fact belong to God. He made every thing that there is. *Each little flower that opens, Each little bird that sings, He made their glowing colours, He made their tiny wings.* The first emotion this inspires is surely praise. The psalmist grows on to draw another moral, however. God doesn't actually need anything from us – sacrifice of farm animals, our time, our singing, our charity work. God doesn't need anything from us, but what He requires of us is that we keep His perfect law of love. The psalm finishes: *O consider this, ye that forget God: lest I pluck you away, and there be none to deliver you. Whoso offereth me thanks and praise, he honoureth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation right will I shew the salvation of God.*

Incidentally it's good to have friends who know the Bible well enough to quote from memory and aren't ashamed to do so. At her funeral we sang, *Let us labour for the Master from the dawn to setting sun, Let us talk of all his wondrous love and care; Then when all of life is over, and our work on earth is done, And the roll is called up yonder I'll be there.*

October 17<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v26

*And God said, Let us make man in our own image.*

Why the plural, *Let us*, not *Let me make man in my own image*? In the original Hebrew it may well be that the plural is used as an intensive. God is so wonderful that the singular isn't enough! So the Queen says *we* when she means *I*. The early Church (which largely spoke Greek of course) quickly took this as an indication that God is Holy Trinity from the very beginning. God is eternal. He is unchangeable. If God is Trinity now, therefore, He is Trinity in all eternity. The God Who is is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons and One God.

October 18<sup>th</sup> (St Luke)

Genesis 1 v26

*And God said, Let us make man in our own image.*

The Church soon went beyond pointing out that God speaks in the plural even in the first chapter of Genesis. Back in verse 2 it says the *Spirit of God* moved upon the face of the waters. Every act of creation is prefaced by the words *God said*. In Psalm 33 this becomes: *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made*. St John's Gospel tells us: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*. The Word of God is the Son of God. The Word of God is Jesus. Thus even at the very beginning of the Bible, in the act of Creation, God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the same Spirit Who dwells in us. This is the Word engrafted in our hearts. It is through the Word and the Spirit that we call God: *Our Father*.

October 19<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v26

*And God said, Let us make man in our own image.*

So what is this image of God in which human beings are made? For one thing, I think we can speak of the personhood of God. God is a person, three persons, to Whom we can relate personally. We are persons. We can speak of God's creativity and we are creative. We can speak of God as working and we too are fulfilled by doing good work. We can say that all the qualities of God – justice, mercy, beauty, holiness, etc., - are potentially reflected in human beings created in His image. That is who we are meant to be, what we are meant to be. Above all I think we should say with St John, *God is love*. Human beings are meant to love – to love God and to love one another, in fact to be love as God is love.

October 20<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v26

*And God said, Let us make man in our own image.*

The cynical atheist says that Man created God in his own image. The atheist is right that human beings make gods for themselves – idols, created phenomena like the heavenly bodies, imaginary beings, wealth, power and celebrity status – and that human beings try to make themselves gods. Romans 1 v25 describes human beings as those *who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature, more than the creator*. Everything else follows from that!

October 21<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 1 v26

*And God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.* Many commentators have suggested that God's image and likeness are two different things and that maybe one is lost in the Fall and the other is not. I think, however, that they are probably wrong. Image and likeness are two different words for the same thing, both used here for poetic effect. Put simply, the reality is that we are all made in the image and likeness of God. We are all made to be the children of God. We are made to love our God and to love one another. We are, however, free to choose whether we will love or not. If we choose not to love we forfeit our eternity. All human beings choose not to love and therefore we have all forfeited our eternity. God's love, however, is such that He sends His Son, His love incarnate, to fulfil all the Law's demands for us. Therefore, through faith in Him, we may be reinstated into God's family and regain our inheritance of eternal life. It's not complicated. Repent and believe!

October 22<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 1 v26

*And God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion.*

This is extraordinary to me. When these words were first written, there were not so many human beings in the world. Vast tracts of land were uninhabited. For many life was *nasty, brutish and short*. Human beings couldn't fly. They couldn't run or climb or swim as well as many animals could. By comparison with many creatures, human beings were weak and helpless. Yet already our ancestors could receive this message and believe that we were meant to have dominion over the *fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over creeping that creepeth upon the earth.*

And now the human population has exploded. We have domesticated so many kinds of plants and animals. We can genetically engineer them. We've transformed our lives with machinery. We've ventured into space. We've created weapons capable of destroying the habitable earth. Prophecy come true, but prophecy reminds us that those who receive blessings are responsible for what they do with their blessings, dominion implies stewardship, authority is accountable.

October 23<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 1 v27

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*

Some people say that the Bible is a sexist book and so it is by modern standards. Is that so much the worse for the Bible or so much the worse for modern standards? Sexist the Bible may be when measured against the Equality Act, but it is certainly untrue to say that it does not value women equally with men. We see here that men and women alike are created in the image of God. In Galatians 3 v23 St Paul says: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.* Just as we are all created equal, so we are all redeemed and sanctified equally in Christ and by the Holy Spirit. There is no distinction based on ethnicity, class or gender. The Bible does not however deduce from this essential equality that the differences between men and women are insignificant. God could of course have made us hermaphrodites like earthworms with every individual having both male and female organs, but He didn't. The Bible is quite relaxed about men and women normally exercising different rolls because men are better suited to some tasks and women to others.

I notice in modern feminism two strands of thought which are actually logically incompatible. One line of thought takes it for granted that men and women are essentially the same apart from minor plumbing details. It is therefore unfair to discriminate between men and women and jobs should go to the best applicant irrespective of sex. If the job involves carrying 1 cwt sacks, it should be offered to anyone who can carry a 1 cwt sack. The other strand is that men and women are different and complementary – the view that Lehman Brothers would have traded more cautiously if half of them had been sisters. On this view you do make special arrangements to attract women. If many women can't carry 1 cwt you put your product in smaller sacks which they can lift. Now logically, men and women are either essentially the same and therefore interchangeable in any roll or they are different in which case men may be better at some things and women better at others. The first view is obviously nonsense. The second seems to me to undermine the feminist case!

October 24<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v28

*And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.*

A young Jewish man once pointed out to me that this is the first commandment in the Bible. It is given in the context that God blessed the human race He had created. This is a God Who delights in human life and in human flourishing. Blessing and thanksgiving are very closely related in the Hebrew and Greek languages in which the Bible is written. God delights in us and blesses us. If we delight in God, we thank Him for everything He has given us, including the gift of life itself. What we are thankful for, we bless; we dedicate ourselves and whatever we possess to God so that we may be a blessing to the whole of God's world.

October 25<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 vv29 & 30

*And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.*

I was thinking that October 5<sup>th</sup> was my father's birthday. As a boy and a young man he had sung in the choir at Southfleet Church and Harvest was one of his favourite times of the year. I love to see the church building decorated with the fruits of the earth and I love the harvest hymns. There was a time when Harvest Festival would see the church full of people. The fact that God gives us everything we need for our earthly existence is a tremendous reason to celebrate. It's good to thank God, to bless His Holy Name, to consecrate all the good gifts He has given us with our thanks and praise, to consecrate them for the meeting of our own needs and to share them with other people. I also remember going with my father to industrial "harvest" festivals when the Church invited us to celebrate the gifts God has given us through industry – the raw materials, the brains to devise ways to process them, the work of those in the mines, factories and mills. I suppose we could celebrate other industries too – the hospitality and service industries for example, everything in which human endeavour works in partnership with God to produce blessing. If we forget to be thankful we don't receive the fulness of God's blessing. 10 lepers were cleansed in Luke 17, but it was only the one who was thankful who was made whole.

October 26<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v31

*And God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good.* There is a bit of a tension here between texts which seem to celebrate the world and texts which seem to eschew the world, for example James 4 v4: *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.* Yet Jesus tells us that *God so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son* and that, *as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.* So what is going on here? Is the world something good for which we should give thanks or is the world something evil which we should avoid?

Just as we said a few days ago that the word *heaven* has several meanings in the Bible, so has the word *world*. The physical universe created by God is good because it is the creation of the good God. The world is spoilt by its rebellion against God, but God is love and God still loves His errant creation. *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* So God loves the world even in its sin. If we are truly the children of God, we too love the world in that sense and are willing to sacrifice self in order to serve the world by bringing the worldly back to God. In other parts of the Bible, however, including James, the *world* means the values of the world, the values of unredeemed humanity, rebellion against God, the worship of the created rather than the Creator. It is love of the world in this sense – idolatry, the worship of the material, surrendering our lives to what is less than God – that is apostasy, infidelity to God, adultery against God. When the Church cleaves to the world's values the Bride of Christ is unfaithful to Him with a lover whose love can only destroy.

October 27<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 1 v31

*And God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good.* I don't know if you've noticed, but we've been quoting appropriate bits of the Communion service in the order in which they come in *Common Worship*. Here let's celebrate with *Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father. We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.*

October 28<sup>th</sup> (St Simon & St Jude)

Genesis 2 vv 1-3

Some reasons for keeping a Christian Sabbath:

*It is one of God's commandments;*

*It gives a structure to our week;*

*We need the rest;*

*We need to spend time with God;*

*We need time for family and friends and for leisure activities;*

*It makes the point that there is more to life than work;*

*We don't have to work all the time because we can trust God for our lives.*

*Taking part in worship with others is good for us;*

*If enough people stop going to church the Church will cease to exist;*

*If we engage in commercial activities on Sundays we are helping to put other people in the position where they have to work Sundays;*

*If we don't keep Sunday special we are a bad witness to other people, including our own families and friends.*

October 29<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 vv 1-3

Why do we keep the first day of the week as a day of rest when God kept the seventh day? The point is that Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday. Sunday is the first day of the new creation. We are born again in Christ. In Him God is making all things new. This is why fonts traditionally have 8 sides – six days of Creation, the day God rested, the first day of the new creation. On the first Easter Sunday Christ made Himself known to His disciples in the Breaking of Bread, where two or three were met together and in the exposition of the Scriptures. Basically this is the pattern of the Sunday Communion in which I have little doubt that all Christians ought to participate.

October 30<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 vv 4-6

This is a new beginning. It is a different aspect of the Creation, a different story from the one we have just read. There are several versions of Creation in the Bible just as there are four gospels telling the story of Jesus, at least two accounts of Israel's history in Samuel/Kings & Chronicles, letters from different apostles. It's all too wonderful for one account to be sufficient. We need to come at the Truth from different angles.



October 31<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 2 v7

*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*

This is what we are. We are formed of the dust of the earth. We are of the same matter as animals and plants and indeed of inanimate objects. We are of the earth – the God created earth. We are also of God. God breathes into us the breath of life. We breathe the air, the natural air. If we stop breathing air we cease to live. The breath of God is also the Holy Spirit, the divine Spirit, *the Lord and Giver of life*. We human beings are also inspired by the Holy Spirit, through Whom, as children of God, we cry *Abba*, Father. We belong to the earth. We have our place in time and space, but we are also of God. The life which is in us is eternal life. Yet sin quenches the Spirit. We sin and the wages of sin is death. We fail to attain our God-given potential, but God in His love offers us a new creation in Christ, the only human being Whose body, mind and spirit fully cooperates with the Spirit of God.

November 1<sup>st</sup> (All Saints)

Genesis 2 vv 8-15

Many years ago we had a flower festival at St Michael's in which the various arrangements as you went around the Church depicted the Bible Story (Salvation History) from the beginning to the end of time. The porch was both the beginning and the end, the Garden of Eden and Heaven.

*O Almighty God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come at last to those unspeakable joys, which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

November 2<sup>nd</sup> (All Souls)

Genesis 2 vv 16&17

Why did God plant the tree in the garden if Adam was not to touch it? After all God knew that Adam would eat of the tree and all the evil that would follow from that disobedience. But God wants free people not programmed robots. Ultimately things will be better because we are free than they would have been if we'd been programmed – another way of looking at the Problem of Evil.

November 3<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 2 v18

*And the LORD God said, It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*

Human beings are made in the image of God. We are made for love. God is three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, eternally one in a perfect unity of love. We cannot be fulfilled as God-like persons on our own. We must love and we must be loved. We are loved by God and we are unfilled as human beings if we do not love Him. Maybe some very few people are fulfilled the vocation of being hermit – though even they must once have been children, dependent on a mother's love. We need the love of mortal beings and, while we can and do have relationships with other creatures, we need the love of fellow human beings – family and friends. *You shall love your neighbour as yourself. Who is my neighbour? He that shewed mercy.*

The love the Bible is talking about is much more than romantic love. It may well include romance, as we shall see, but what the Bible means by *It is not good for the man to be alone* is something much more profound than the lyrics of desperate teenage pop songs.

November 4<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v 19

Like the man Adam the animals are made of the dust of the ground. We are animals. But it says nothing about God breathing into the animals the breath of life so that they become living souls. We are different from animals. We partake also of the divine nature. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body. Adam was made a living soul, but Jesus, the second Adam, was made a quickening spirit. In Christ, and through Him alone, our end is to live eternally in a unity of love within the Blessed Trinity.

November 5<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v20

Adam names the animals because he has dominion over them. They are for him to use which means that he is responsible for their welfare. The Name of God is disclosed by God alone. The Name of God is never to be taken in vain. Rather the Name of God is to be hallowed. If we hallow the Creator's Name, we respect ourselves created in His image and we accept responsibility for the welfare of His Creation.

November 6<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 vv 21-23

*Helpmeet* has come to be a fancy synonym for *wife*, which is to misunderstand the traditional translation. The woman is a meet help for Adam – an appropriate, suitable, proper, help – as in *It is very meet, right and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty and Everlasting God.*

*It is not good for the man to be alone.* No other mortal creature is an adequate friend for Adam. So God creates out of Adam a being like himself. God makes of the one two so that the two may be one in mutual love – reflecting the way in which God is three persons, Who are one with each other in mutual love. Some people read this story of the rib as though it implied that woman was some sort of afterthought on God's part, an adjunct of Adam. I think rather the point is that Eve is of the same substance as Adam, different and distinct, so that they may complement one another in a perfect union of love, a help meet, not a rival or an enemy.

November 7<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v24

God is love and human beings made in His image ought to be love too. Love is not just the boyfriend/girlfriend thing the pop stars sing about. That is important. There ought to be passion. There ought to be passion in all our relationships – with God and with other people. But love includes our relationships with our parents and our children and our brothers and sisters (all different kinds of love), also with our friends and with other members of our churches and, potentially, if only we obeyed God's commandment, with all our neighbours.

But married love is special. *They shall be one flesh.* Jesus quotes these words against divorce. Married love, like God's love, is supposed to be unconditional – *for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health.* God doesn't divorce us no matter how wretched we turn out to be. Given the imperfection of human nature, we do have to find ways of dealing with marriage breakdown showing compassion to all parties, but we should not ever be relaxed about divorce which is never meant to happen.

November 8<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 2 v25

I often joke that the human body is about the only animal body that doesn't look good naked. Everything else seems to have attractive fur, feathers or scales, often beautifully coloured. Even things like whales and walrus have enough blubber to support their skin as an attractive body sculpture. I don't think that's the point here, however. Sex is one of those powerful forces like fire – a good servant, but a bad master. So long as we walk with God, sex is a great blessing, an expression of what it is for a man and his wife to be one flesh and the means of procreation. When we forsake the wisdom which is rooted in the fear of the LORD, we become slaves to sin and sex turns into a monster which destroys our capacity for love rather than enhancing it and breaks up families rather than supporting them. Surely the implication of St Paul's words in Romans 1 is that sin, including sexual sin, takes hold of the human race because we worship ourselves and what we have made rather than worshipping the One Who made us. I do believe that people who live together outside marriage and people who divorce and people who find their fulfilment in same sex relationships must be treated both with respect and with compassion, by the Church as well as by society at large, but personally I believe that if only people walked with God they would choose either lifelong marriage or lifelong celibacy and that this would be better both for themselves and for society as a whole. So I'm looking for a way of working with people in these positions while upholding the higher ideal.

November 9<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v1

I was talking to somebody yesterday who had a real fright when she found a grass snake sleeping on her doorstep. A lot of people don't like snakes, even though the non-poisonous ones like grass snakes are completely harmless and most of the poisonous ones won't bite you unless you frighten them. When you think about it, snakes are really rather marvellous and some people are passionate about snakes. They are often beautifully marked. It is astonishing how they move around without legs. Some of them have sense organs that we don't – like heat detectors. They can swallow food much larger than they are. Snakes are amazing – something to thank God for as a marvel of creation. The snake is a symbol of evil, but also of Jesus – John 3 v14.

November 10<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 vv 1-5

*And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die.*

God warned Adam and Eve that if they ate of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden they would surely die. Satan told them that was not true. Satan tells us that we can't trust God and that we have to succeed by our own efforts and to live by the world's standards so long as we live in the world. Physical exercise is more important than church. Fitting in with people is more important than sticking by your principles. Romantic love matters more than the love of God. You can't get on in business if you're not prepared to exercise sharp elbows. Lying is sometimes necessary to protect your company or to retain political power or just to get yourself out of an embarrassing situation. But the devil is the father of lies.

November 11<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v6

The tree looked like it was good to eat. Sinful things often do appear attractive. If they didn't there wouldn't be temptation. But the devil is a liar. An illicit love affair will not bring happiness. The acquisition of wealth or power won't bring you fulfilment. You can't live your life on the material level and neglect the spiritual and still expect to flourish as a human being. The wrath of man really doesn't accomplish the purposes of God. I missed out at least one more reason for keeping the Sabbath.

*If you don't keep any time as sacred, you'll finish up keeping no time as sacred.*

November 12<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v7

Why was it a sin to eat to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? Maybe we're just not responsible if we don't know any better. Maybe the knowledge of right and wrong tempts you to do wrong. St Paul says (Romans 7 v8) *But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.* I find it hard to believe that ignorance is bliss or that it is a bad thing in itself to gain knowledge. After all, we are made in the image of God and God knows everything. In Heaven, we shall know as we are known. I don't understand why it was wrong to eat the fruit, except that it is always wrong to disobey God.

November 13<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v7

One of the consequences of eating the fruit was that their nakedness now troubled them. In that verse from St Paul we looked at yesterday, the knowledge of the law provoked desire. That could mean lust or greed or covetousness. The implication is any wrong desire, any desire which leads us into sin – disobedience to God, unloving behaviour. As in the Confession, *We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us.* So they made themselves aprons of fig leaves, but it would take more than that to make them right once again with God and with one another. *There is no health in us.* We are entirely dependent on God to set us free from sin, to cleanse us, to make us at one with Him and with one another. We are entirely dependent on His *promises declared unto mankind in Jesus Christ.*

November 14<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v8

But first we have to become aware of our need for God. A lot of people go through life apparently not thinking very much about God. There is, however, always something missing from such a life. In fact most people in the world today have some sort of religious belief as most people always have had. Life really would be too bleak and barren without any at all of the hope that religion offers. People may follow false religions – some of them quite horrific leading their disciples to persecute followers of other faiths or to become suicide bombers. People may be superstitious, believing in all sorts of rubbish about omens and luck, star signs and the like. People may substitute for religion with drugs and sex and rock and roll or wealth and power. God is the *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans* – the fearful but fascinating mystery. We hear the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and we hide ourselves. However, only God can meet our ultimate human need and we can only approach God through repentance and faith. That is what we human beings find so hard to do, but it is the only way, the narrow way which leads to life. *Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.* (Matthew 7 v13).

November 15<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v9

*And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?*

Adam is the archetypal human being – created by God, richly blessed by God, rebellious against God, yet still sought after by God. God does not give up on us. He calls to you and me. Every single one of us matters to God. God made me. Jesus died for me. His Spirit lives within me. Jesus constantly prays for me at His Father's Throne – His Father's Throne and my Father's Throne. These are things I need to remember when my thoughts, words and deeds are unworthy of my Christian calling. These are things I need to remember when I feel unloved or overwhelmed by the challenges life presents. Even when I go astray, He still calls me.

November 16<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v9

*And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?*

*Where art thou?* It's a good question we all might ask ourselves. Where are we? What have we achieved in life? What is important to us? What do we have to be thankful for? What challenges do we face? What in our lives are we ashamed of? What do we hope for? What are we afraid of? Where art thou? Can we bear for our lives to be examined in the light of God? Or do we hide like Adam and Eve in the bushes? Just after comparing Himself to a snake on a pole (a sign of healing and life) in John 3, Jesus says, *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

Our lives only make sense in the Light of Christ. Unless we come into the Light, we shall surely die in the darkness. But we have to have faith enough in God to confess our sins to the One Who is *faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

*And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?*

God is looking for Adam and Eve for judgment. God is just. Ultimately the Universe is just. We look around us and, as the Bible teaches us, we see a lot of undeserved suffering and we see the wicked prosper. But ultimately, the Bible assures us, this is not how it will be. The poor man Lazarus resides in Abraham's bosom and the rich man who left Lazarus to beg at his gate finds himself in a place of torment. (Luke 16). The Universe is ultimately just because God is just. We shall all be judged and we shall all get what we deserve. Without justice, there is no morality. Without justice there can be no sensible law. Without justice, law amounts to nothing more than the caprice of the law makers and of the law enforcers. From a very early age, children have a strong sense of fairness, which is another word for justice. They have a strong sense of right and wrong, of what is owed to them, of what they and other people deserve. If there were no justice, we might just as well be animals, our conduct determined by the *survival of the fittest*. There would be no hope for the weak and oppressed, nothing for the oppressors to fear. Justice is fundamental to what it means to be human, but, then we are made in the image of God and God is just. So justice is primary, a first principle. If God were not just in judging Adam, there would be no point in the rest of the Bible or indeed of subsequent human history. As we shall see, justice is indivisible from mercy, because God is merciful as well as just. Justice and mercy are two sides of the same coin. We must not, however, leap to the assumption that a merciful God cannot but overlook sin and that therefore everybody gets to Heaven regardless. To do so would be to treat as insignificant the sufferings of the victims of human cruelty and indifference.

Another way of looking at the problem of evil, complementary with seeing evil as the price of freedom or reckoning evil as nothing, as the absence of good, rather than as a created reality, is to remember that the incarnate Son of God shares the sufferings of the victim and bears the punishment of the perpetrators.



November 18<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v9

*And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?*

This is one of my *things*. We no longer sing the verse *The rich man in his castle, The poor man at his gate, God made them high or lowly, And ordered their estate*. Apart from the fact that some people might think this hymn is too long anyway, I guess the reason is that we don't want to perpetrate old-fashioned ideas about people knowing their place, ideas which only too easily invite the rich to feel a sense of entitlement and can be used to keep the poor down, perhaps suggesting that there will be reward in heaven for bearing their earthly poverty patiently – pie in the sky when you die.

Three points:

If God didn't make them highly or lowly and order their estate, who did? We are all the creation of God and surely all our lives are lived under God's providence.

The fact that someone starts off poor doesn't mean that God doesn't want him to use his efforts and opportunities to improve his position. The fact that someone is rich doesn't mean that God doesn't invite him to use his riches to do good, possibly even to say to him *Sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven*, even though it would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Surely you can't sing this hymn without thinking of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, where the rich man exchanges his castle for torment and the poor man at his gate finishes up in heaven.

*Where art thou?* How didst thou get there? What art thou going to do about it? Where wilt thou finish up?

November 19<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v9

*And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?*

One more sobering thought. Adam and Eve, the rich man and the poor man need Jesus to save them in whatever situation they find themselves. But the final warning in Luke 16 is that, if people don't believe Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even if one rises from the dead!

November 20<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v10

*I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked;  
and I hid myself.*

Human beings decline to come to the light. They don't want their lives to be exposed to the full glare of justice. We know that we have fallen a long way short of what we ought to be. We hear a lot about people being too busy to come to church. We hear a lot about people being put off church because it's old-fashioned and boring and because they don't like the vicar or the congregation. We hear a lot of congregations crying out for the service to be dumbed down either because they themselves find it too much or because they think a lower level of commitment might bring other people in. There may be some truth in all these reasons, but might it not also be that a lot of it is just excuses? People don't want to stand in the full light of God, in a place where they can be measured against what a human being ought to be, Jesus Christ, born witness to in the Word and present in the Sacrament. We can indulge ourselves by lying in bed, shopping or relaxing over a full English and the Sunday papers. We can feel virtuous exercising, enjoying nature or performing community service. We can feel even more virtuous coming to a church where we get to sing rousing but meaningless choruses, enjoy a children's presentation instead of a sermon, non-scriptural readings partially displacing the Bible and prayers more our personal wish list than a desire to conform to the Will of God and the Sacrament relegated to a pious few at an out of the way time. But isn't what we really need an encounter with the living God? A service based around the Bible, God's Word, and the Sacrament, *Do this in remembrance of me*, and hymns, choruses and prayers which reflect on these awful truths? I think such a Church would start small, but it would be a strong Church and a growing Church, whereas a Church which joins in the conspiracy to evade God in the hope of competing with the Sunday run, sleeping off Saturday night and catching up on the housework, may be large, but it will certainly be weak and, unless it catches the vision of God in spite of itself, such a Church must be doomed.

November 21<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 3 vv 11-13

Maybe I'm getting old and cynical but it often seems to me that nobody is prepared to take responsibility anymore. Perhaps it's listening to the *Today* programme every day, but I get so fed up with hearing that it is all the fault of the last government, or of things happening abroad outside our control, or of some minor functionary in the department, or of the unions, or the schools, or the parents, or too much immigration or not enough immigration, or too little investment or the squandering of public money, or of the cuts or of the failure to make cuts, or whatever – and it's been going on as long as I can remember no matter what government is in power. Whatever is wrong is never the responsibility of the speaker. There is always an excuse, someone else to blame. And very often you don't even get as far as asking questions about why things have gone wrong because you can't get past the cover up even to realise just how bad things really are. It sometimes seems that the only one who ever gets the sack is the whistle blower who brings an organisation's failings out into the open. How about some honesty? "It was my fault. Sorry. I'm doing my best to make amends." Of course if that's the way you think the world should work, you have to start with yourself. "It was my fault. Sorry. I'm doing my best to make amends."

November 22<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 3 v14

Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the serpent. There are consequences for all three as rebellion against God always has consequences.

November 23<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 3 v15

This reading is often used at Christmas and is equally appropriate at Easter. The immediate literal sense is obviously that snakes in the grass bite people and people go after snakes with sticks. But the reading is also a prophecy of something much more profound. The seed of Eve is Jesus, the Son of Man. God the Son is made flesh and becomes a man. He is the second Adam. Unlike the first Adam, He is obedient, even to death on the Cross. In that act of self-sacrificing love, He overcomes the power of the Evil One (symbolised by the snake) to kill.

*For Judah's Lion bursts his chains, crushing the serpent's head,  
And cries aloud through death's domains to wake the imprisoned dead.*

November 24<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v16

*Thy desire shall be to thy husband.*

One of life's mysteries is why some women become attached to bad men, men who abandon them and any children they have, men who beat them up. It is not unusual for a woman who had a violent father to choose an abusive boyfriend or to change one aggressive male partner for another time after time. Awfully, sometimes this is because abused women may feel somehow that they do not deserve to be loved by a decent man and yet that they cannot live without a man. The implication of this verse too seems to be that the harsh rule which some men seem to exercise over their women is a consequence of sin. That being so, considering that the Christian faith is about the forgiveness of sin and a new creation in which righteousness dwells, religious people ought to be in the forefront of efforts to protect women, to enable them to escape from domineering and abusive men, as indeed to ameliorate the pain and risk of childbirth. A Christian husband will honour his wife, will respect her, will give himself for her as Christ gave Himself for the Church. It is terrifying to think even in this country of the number of young people growing up without an understanding of what a Christian family is – violent estates where teenage boys deal drugs and carry knives and teenage girls are treated merely as potential baby mothers, children whose own parents are unmarried leading chaotic lives on and off benefits, anaesthetised by drugs. There is a tremendous roll worldwide for Christian organisations like the Mothers Union to bear witness to and to support what family life was meant to be – husbands and wives united in love for God and for one another, caring for their children and wider family and for other people in the community.

November 25<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 vv 17-19

I've been a bit puzzled for a long time by these verses. Man is made in the image of God and God works. He creates and sustains everything. We are fulfilled when we work and unfulfilled when we don't. I dread retirement. Working for a living gives us dignity. Yet in these verses, having to work for a living is a punishment. I presume this is because the work is drudgery, not particularly creative, unfulfilling because it is hard to achieve anything worthwhile. Redeemed humanity works the work of God, which is to believe in Jesus Christ Whom He has sent.

November 26<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v20

In the Hebrew this is much clearer. The name translated *Eve* is actually derived from the verb *to live*. So Eve's name in Hebrew translates as *life*. Contrary to popular belief, the Bible does not portray woman as inferior or women as second class men. Women are essential in Creation and Redemption. Without Eve, there would have been no human beings after Adam. Without Mary, there would have been no Jesus. There is a risk in feminism of downgrading women. If the male is taken as the standard for a human being, then obviously women will often appear to fall short of the standard. There is a reason why men and women don't compete together in many Olympic events. In the same way if the female is taken as the standard, men will appear to fall short of the standard. However, once it is acknowledged that women and men really are different and that there are aspects of the way the world works in which men will generally be more suitable than women and other aspects in which women will be more suitable than men, we can rejoice in real equality.

November 27<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v21

*Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins and clothed them.*

In many ways the Bible story is a story of failure, of our failure as human beings to respond to the love of God. Time after time we read in the Bible about how abundantly God has blessed us only for us to reject Him and His blessings, to rebel against His holy Law of love and to bring on ourselves disaster after disaster. God made Adam and Eve and gave them everything they required in the Garden of Eden and they rejected His Love and were expelled. God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt with ten plagues sent on the Egyptians and the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and He gave them the Law on Mount Sinai and they refused to trust Him and enter into the Promised Land and they refused to trust Him to provide for their needs in the desert. So they wandered in the wilderness for forty years until that generation died out. Similar stories recur throughout the OT. When God sent us His Son, we crucified Him. Similar stories recur throughout subsequent human history. But God does not abandon us to the consequences of our sin. He even clothed Adam & Eve.

November 28<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v22

Was the Tree of Life the same tree as the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil or were there two different trees? We are not told. The implication of the whole story is that, had mankind not sinned, we should not have died. *The wages of sin is death*. Death is the ultimate consequence of our rebellion against the Source of all life, God Himself. The Creed refers to the Holy Spirit as *the Lord, the Giver of Life*. St Paul warns us not to quench the Spirit, but that is what we do when we harden our hearts against God. So Adam presumably didn't need the fruit of the Tree of Life until he had eaten of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Prior to that he was not susceptible to death anyway. There is a long tradition, however, of the *felix culpa*, the happy fault, the idea that God's design worked out so that Adam lost his everlasting life in Eden in order that we human beings, through Jesus the second Adam, would gain eternal life in heaven. God always knew that Adam would fall and be cast out of Eden and He always intended through humanity's Fall to bless us even more richly than He had blessed Adam with eternity in the Fulness of His presence. The Tree of Life, in that case, is a "type" of the Cross, the rood (wood) on which Jesus died for the sins of the whole world.

"O felix culpa quae talem et tantum meruit habere redemptorem," "O happy fault that merited such and so great a Redeemer."

November 29<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 3 v23

The Hebrew for ground is Adamah. The man Adam is taken from the dust of the Adamah and God breathes into him the breath of life and he becomes a living soul. Now, after the Fall, Adam is to live by tilling the Adamah. We are material beings and we work with the material. We are composed of the same elements as the homes we live in, the clothes we wear, the food we eat and the materials we work with. It is only too easy to lose sight of the fact that God has breathed into us the breath of life and that we are living souls. So we should respect other human beings. So we should respect ourselves. Respecting ourselves as living souls, we lift our eyes up above the merely material to seek God, the source of our life; we look to Jesus the quickening Spirit, the Holy Ghost Who gives life to our mortal bodies. We know better than to "live" at the level of the merely material. Jesus alone bestows real life.

November 30<sup>th</sup> (St Andrew)

Genesis 3 v24

The Bible talks about angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim. There are few descriptions. If we had images of these spiritual beings we might be tempted to worship them when only God is worthy of our worship. In any case, their home is in heaven and they are way past our understanding. From the descriptions we have, angels are messengers and also guardians of individuals and peoples; archangels are simply chief angels; cherubim are best described as resembling winged bull-like animals; and seraphim are like flames of fire. In the Bible story we encounter these beings coming to earth, entering our material realm, for particular purposes. We also encounter them worshipping in the spiritual realm, worshipping around the Throne of God in Heaven. We also are taught in the Bible that God's people are saints – sanctified by the Blood of Jesus – and that God's saints belong in heaven. God created both a material realm and a spiritual realm. God fills Heaven and Earth and Heaven and Earth exist in Him. We relate to God as Father through Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus enters the material realm. Jesus receives a body made of Adamah and works with the Adamah both as a carpenter and as a healer. Angels and archangels are as much created beings as are human beings, animals, plants and rocks, but the angels are spiritual created beings and we are material created beings. Jesus is the God Who created and redeems both material and spiritual through what He did in the material realm dying on the Cross. Through Him we created mortal material beings become a new creation. *As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.* It is mind-blowing, but it is so.

December 1<sup>st</sup>

Genesis 3 v24

It isn't possible for Adam of his own volition to return to Eden and to partake of the Tree of Life. This is original sin. We cannot help ourselves. *There is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us miserable offenders. Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults, Restore thou them that are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord.* It all depends on God. We cannot save ourselves. Only God can save us. What is required of us is faith.

December 2<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 4 v1

*And Adam knew his wife.*

When you think about it, and leaving aside the sniggering jokes in a hundred “romantic comedies”, this biblical metaphor for the closeness of husband and wife is rather wonderful. *They shall be one flesh. And Adam knew his wife.* Lifting our eyes above the material as we remember that human beings are living souls inspired by the Breath of God, we can see that it is very sad when this precious relationship is devalued to become a mere recreation or, worse still, an exploitative relationship in which one makes use of the other solely for his or her own gratification. St Paul says, *Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?* The implication for chastity is self-evident.

December 3<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 4 v1

*I have gotten a man from the LORD.*

Children are a gift of God. Everyone of them is made in the image of God. For everyone of them Christ died. There used to be a slogan *Make every child a wanted child.* It was an advertisement for family planning. But planned or unplanned, all human life is the gift of God and no human life at all should be described as unwanted. This has enormous implications for the way we care for children in our society and in the world at large and not only for children but for *all sorts and conditions of men.* Think how it rends the heart of God to see His precious children living in poverty and squalor, ignored or actively abused. Think how it rends the heart of God to see His children killing or stealing, oppressing the poor or just passing by on the other side. Think how it rends the heart of God to see lives destroyed by drugs or drink or gambling or sexual exploitation. Think how it rends the heart of God to see His children profiting by dealing drugs or excessive alcohol, tempting the weak with false promises or pimping desperate women. If we can think how these things rend the heart of God, they rend our hearts too and then the question is *What are we going to do about them?* We can all pray. There are plenty of opportunities to support missions and charities at home and abroad. We all have opportunities to befriend other people and to be with them as we seek to make all our lives better in every way.



December 4<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 v2

Cain and Abel, the first brothers. Talk about sibling rivalry! They took up different occupations – arable and pastoral farming. Their conflict presages millennia of human beings striving over scarce resources. If you watch westerns, you'll often see in the America of 150 years ago the conflict between the settled farmers fencing the prairies to grow arable crops and the cattlemen driving their herds in search of pasture. There are wars in the world today over oil. Many people think the next middle-eastern wars will be over water. The problems facing people in the Bible are very often the same ones that face us today. The mistakes they made in those days are often the same mistakes as we are making today. The solutions will also be the same in principle – that our actions towards one another must be grounded in the royal law of love.

December 5<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 3-5

Why was it that Abel's offering was acceptable and Cain's was not? One possible answer was that meat was more valuable than grain in economic terms. Cain had stinted in his offering to God. Another view considers the fact that this story was passed down by pastoral people who valued their nomadic way of life as a way of isolating themselves from settled communities in which it was felt that paganism and vice were more likely to take root. We still have a love/hate relationship with cities. On the one hand we value cities for culture and civilisation and for the comforts that communal living brings – efficient public transport, general hospitals, parks, theatres, etc. On the other hand we think of cities as crowded, noisy, and defiled by litter, graffiti and a high crime rate. Until modern sanitation, cities were also hotbeds of disease. In biblical times, nomadic life was more rigorous but also healthier (spiritually as well as bodily) than settled life.

In the light of later biblical material, however, I should look to the spirit in which the two offerings were made. God wants our best. If Cain had offered his best, I'm sure it would have been accepted. Whether Cain's offering was cheap or contaminated by Cain's materialistic lifestyle, I don't know, but I think the real problem was that he was not wholehearted in offering himself, his soul and body, to be a living sacrifice.

December 6<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 6&7

*Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.* (Luke 8 v18).

This is one of the hardest sayings of Jesus and it seems that He said the same thing several times in slightly different ways. It looks so unfair. It reads to us like a newspaper article explaining that bankers' million pound bonuses are being paid out of the taxes of hard-working families who are just about scraping a living. That is not, I think, what Jesus means. What He is saying is that those who are spiritual in their outlook grow more spiritual, whereas those who are selfish grow more and more selfish until they destroy themselves. St Paul puts it like this: *For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.* (Galatians 6 v8). Cain looked after number one, indifferent to God and to man, and he became worse and worse till eventually he murdered his brother. If instead he had cultivated an attitude of love towards God and his fellow man, his offering would have been acceptable and he would have become a better person in a virtuous circle.

December 7<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 v8

A Sunday school teacher was discussing the Ten Commandments with her five and six year olds. After explaining the commandment to 'Honour thy father and thy mother,' she asked, 'Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?' Without missing a beat, one little boy answered, 'Thou shall not kill..'

Now ask yourself why this is funny and why you saw the joke so quickly. Love and hate are not really opposites. They are both ways of being passionate about someone. Hate can flip over into love and love into hate and it is possible to love and hate someone both at the same time. Indifference is more like the opposite of love than hatred, but really the opposite of love is selfishness. Perhaps tough guys should have *love* and *self* tattooed on the knuckles of their two hands! The love we have for brothers and sisters is special and peculiar – often the relationships we have for the longest if you think about it.

December 8<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 v9

*And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother?*

Does that feel to you like an unsettling question? This notion that we are responsible for our brothers and sisters? Where is he? Where is she? If all we human beings are the family of God, then potentially, all human beings are our brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters of the Son of Man, as we are bothers and sisters of Jesus. Other people are our concern if we are children of the heavenly Father outside of Whose Providence not a sparrow falls to the earth. *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me... Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.*

December 9<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 v9

*Am I my brother's keeper?*

This question comes near the beginning of the Bible and clearly Cain thinks the answer ought to be *No*, but isn't it fair to say that much of the rest of the Bible is answering this question *Yes*? You and I are our brothers' keepers. Hence Christian Aid and the Church Army and the Church Mission Society and the Leprosy Mission and Blythswood Care and Demelza House and Poverty and Hope and Bible Lands and the Children's Society and the Bible Society and all the other causes we try to support and the individuals we can help personally.

December 10<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 v10

*What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.*

Actions have consequences. There is justice. Justice is owed to the victims of human iniquity. God is just and God is our judge. Killing Abel does not expunge Abel's right to be avenged and God's mercy, God's love for Cain, does not mean that God can just let him off or overlook what he has done. That would be grotesque. If you look at Hebrews 11 v4, there is a slight hint that murdered Abel lives on in God, in Heaven, in this very point that his blood still cries out after his death. Yet another way of approaching the Problem of Evil is to say that all wrongs are righted in the hereafter.

December 11<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 11&12

This is reminiscent of Adam's punishment. Adam was told he must till the ground (the Adamah) by the sweat of his brow, but the Adamah will be unyielding to Cain's endeavours because the Adamah has soaked up his brother's blood which Cain has spilt. There is a sense that human sin messes up not only human life but the whole created order of which we are a part. One aspect of this might be what the environmentalists warn us of. If we are greedy and use up all the natural resources and generate huge volumes of waste which we throw away heedlessly, we mess up the planet, ruining its fertility. Maybe if we concrete the trees and grass and create a noisy world in which birdsong can no longer be heard over the noise of the traffic, lighting our streets so brightly that we can no longer see the stars, we deprive our souls of an important source of nourishment. If we fight battles, if we ignore the needs of others, we destroy the earth on which ultimately we all depend. These are just some of the ways in which human selfishness, ignorance, heedlessness, indifference, violence and dishonesty may damage not only other people and ourselves personally but also the very Adamah of which we are made and which we need to sustain our material existence. Conversely psalms such as 65 and 67 and other parts of the Bible celebrate the fact that if we honour God and respect His Creation and live in love and charity with one another, we discover that there is an abundant harvest more than sufficient to meet the needs of all.

December 12<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 v14

It seems that there were people other than Adam and Eve and their family. Remember in Genesis 1 God creates humankind in general. It is only in Genesis 2 that God focuses in on the family of Adam. There is more a tension than a contradiction. Some people would explain this tension by pointing out that Genesis is telling a story to explain how things are, what human beings are, how we relate to God and to one another, not perhaps a literal historical or scientific account. Others read these chapters more straightforwardly as history and think of the human beings who were not of Adam's family as being wiped out in the Flood. An interesting idea proposed by Prof Sam Berry is that Adam's family were human beings with a living soul and other early humans (hominids?) were more like animals. We just don't know!

December 13<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 v14

*Everyone that findeth me shall slay me.*

In the days before organised courts and a police service, justice was enforced by the entire community. In particular the family of a victim would exact vengeance on his murderer. Later on in the Bible, you can read how this system was regulated in an attempt to make sure that the guilty were punished and only the guilty! Lengthy prison sentences were scarcely practical in a nomadic culture and even where there were towns and cities places of confinement would be likely to be rough and inhumane. For some crimes the penalty might be a heavy fine (if you could afford it) together with paying hefty compensation for any injury or loss you had caused. For more serious crimes, the only penalty was death and death seemed a particularly appropriate punishment for murder. *Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.* (Genesis 9 v6). Yet it is interesting that the first murderer is not to be punished by death. Indeed God makes a special point of protecting him from those who might have thought they were doing their civic duty by executing him. There are lots of reasons for being against the death penalty, not least of which is that it denies the criminal the possibility of repentance and renewal. *God desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live.*

December 14<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 v15

*And the LORD set a mark upon Cain.*

People talk about the mark of Cain as though it were a badge of shame. In fact, here it is to protect the first murderer. God cares about the perpetrator as well as the victim. And so, therefore, should we. Justice does entail the possibility of punishment and one aspect of punishment is retribution, not so very far from revenge. Punishment is also supposed to be deterrent, to put other people off committing the same offence. But punishment is also about rehabilitating the offender and we should never forget that convicted criminals have to be treated decently and respected as human beings and supported in being reformed. It is worth reminding ourselves, however, that the retribution element limits what we can do in the interests of deterrence or rehabilitation. The punishment cannot be more severe than the crime

deserves. Hanging for parking offence might be an effective deterrent, but it would be unjust. Locking up a petty shoplifter for decades while psychologists attempt to reform him would also be unjust. If you watch what is going on in sentencing policy, I think you can see that people are being punished in excess of what they deserve in some cases as pragmatism replaces principle as the basis on which modern Britain is governed.

December 15<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 16-18

Again we find in the story that there are human beings other than Adam's family. Cain is building a new life with a wife and a new home. Criminals can be rehabilitated. This morning someone mentioned to me how difficult these lists of names are in the Bible, but it's part of knowing who we are, where we come from, who our family were, what they did. Hence the popularity of genealogy and the keeping of records which no longer have any practical relevance.

December 16<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 19-22

A passing interest in these early stories in Genesis is the origin of the way different peoples live and the crafts and skills which make up human civilisation. Someone invented the wheel. Someone recognised the potential of fire. Someone bred plants of the grass family to produce food crops. Someone domesticated sheep, goats, cattle and horses. The origins of all these inventions are lost in mists of human history, but the world would be a very much less comfortable place without them.

December 17<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 23&24

One murder. Another murder. Would it be unreasonable to observe that violence begets violence. The sins of the fathers are visited on subsequent generations both because the children tend to imitate their parents and because the children have to live with the consequences of their parents' wrongdoing. The other morning on the radio I heard some government expert telling us the astounding news that the problem families who cause so much mayhem on our streets have often been problem families for several generations. It occurred to me that she could have saved herself a lot of time if she had just read the Bible. The only way is to break the cycle of crime and deprivation.

December 18<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 4 vv 25&26

Most people have heard of Cain and Abel, but it's the less well-known son Seth who becomes the ancestor of the whole human race. The other families are wiped out in the Flood.

It is interesting what it says about people beginning then to call on the Name of the LORD. I take this to mean a revelation by God of something more of Himself to humanity. The holy Name stands for the holiness of God. It must not be taken in vain. Jesus taught us to pray that it should be hallowed. It is the Name above all names which is bestowed on Jesus when He has emptied Himself and taken the form of a servant, obedient even to death on the Cross. Humanity's relationship with God presumably enters a new phase with Seth.

December 19<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 5 vv 1-17

This is the chapter at which a lot of attempts to read the Bible through from cover to cover founder. I'm not sure about the wisdom of reading the Bible like that. I think I'd suggest to someone coming new to the Bible that they delve into it and read passages which more obviously relate to their lives first. On the other hand, the Bible is all interrelated and you don't get the full meaning of your favourite passages if you don't read them in the context of the whole of God's Word. It is all holy Scripture and I do feel that all Christians ought to read the Bible right through at least once in their lives. If you just keep reading the bits you like, you may do no more than reinforce your prejudices and you will certainly miss out on the riches the Bible contains.

*Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our leaning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Then there is the question of the phenomenal ages these people are credited with and, I'm sorry, I can't help you there because I don't know the answer.

December 20<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 5 vv 18-24

*And Enoch walked with God.*

In the Old Testament, to live a godly life is to walk with God. In the New Testament Jesus is described as the Way. The Christian life is a journey. We have to decide which direction to take. We are confronted with both hardships and opportunities. There may be dangers and things that happen to discourage us. There are many beautiful things to see on the way, many things that encourage us. We have millions of travelling companions. The beginning of the journey is our response to God's Love. The end of our journey is the Love of God. The mystery about Enoch, taken up in the New Testament, is that his walk with God on earth seems to have been so close that he seamlessly walked with Him into Heaven without passing through the valley of the shadow of death (Hebrews 11 v5).

December 21<sup>st</sup> (Old St Thomas' Day)

Genesis 5 vv 25-27

What Methuselah is famous for is that he is credited with the longest human lifespan in history. December 21<sup>st</sup> is the shortest day and the longest night. Traditionally it was celebrated as St Thomas' Day. Thomas is best known as the apostle who initially refused to believe that Jesus, the Light of the World, had risen from the dead. When Christ was crucified there was darkness on the face of the earth for three hours, but very early on the Sunday morning, the tomb was found to be empty. Christ had risen from the dead! To walk with Jesus is to walk in the light. To know Jesus is not like Methuselah to live a very long time (you'd need quite some pension pot) but to have eternal life, life in all its fulness. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the Resurrection and the Life. Thomas did believe eventually. He exclaimed, *My Lord and my God!* Jesus replied, *Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed, blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* The Gospel was written, *that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

*Almighty and everliving God, who for the more confirmation of the faith didst suffer thy holy Apostle Thomas to be doubtful in thy Son's resurrection; Grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt, to believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reproved. Hear us, O Lord, through the same Jesus Christ, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. Amen.*



December 22<sup>nd</sup>

Genesis 5 vv 28-32

At last we are back on familiar territory, with a biblical character whose story we know well. This is the story of the birth of Noah and his family. What is interesting is that Lamech Noah's father foresees that Noah will be a blessing to the human race. *This same will comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands.* I do believe that God has a plan for all our lives. In the Bible we read the stories of famous people who had a huge impact on human history. They must have had. Otherwise we wouldn't still be interested in them after thousands of years. Very often it is made clear that they were chosen by God from birth for these tasks. But I'm sure that God has a plan for everyone of us. It says so in the Bible and it must be so because God is all powerful, all knowing and all loving. Everything that happens happens within the providence of God. He has made each one of us the person you or I are. He has caused us to be born in a particular family. He has given us all different skills and opportunities. I am sure questions like where we live, how we do at school and what we do for a living are all in God's Hands. The lessons I learn from this are to seek God's Will in prayer in the decisions I make about my life, to ask His blessing on everything I do and not to be discouraged. My life is in God's Hands and so long as I am doing His Will things will work out for good even if I can't see it. We trust God not only in some general universal sense but we trust God for every minute of every day and every moment of our lives as Christians is hallowed by our openness to Him. *And we most humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in.*

December 23<sup>rd</sup>

Genesis 6 vv 1-4

Noah's Ark makes a good children's story and lots of children have toy arks even if they aren't from particularly religious homes, but we probably pass over the details (advisedly) when telling the story to children. The problem with that is that we may never advance beyond the children's version ourselves. One of the mistakes we make in the church is to keep things at a childish level, robbing the faith of its power to meet the needs of adolescents and of adults. It's partly why they leave! Sex, violence and irreligion were the problems in Noah's time. What's changed?

December 24<sup>th</sup>

Genesis 6 vv 5-8

The story so far this quarter has been of the good God Who creates a good world and places in that world human beings made in His own image. They are created to love Him in all eternity, to love one another and to be stewards of the good things which God has made. God is necessarily free. There can be no restraints on God. So human beings, made in His image, are free, free to choose to walk with God or to walk away from God. The latter course always has disastrous results, but we are free to take that course and generally we do. We forget God. We love ourselves but not our neighbours. We exploit God's good creation to our own selfish ends. Irreligion, sex and violence. The result is that we destroy what God has made. We destroy other people. We destroy ourselves. Judgment on selfishness (the absence of love) is intrinsic to the structure of the Universe because the laws of nature are the law of God, Who is love. The story of the Flood is the story of the unravelling of Creation because that part of the Creation to which God has entrusted dominion has abused its trust. The waters of the Flood are a return of the waters of chaos back in chapter 1 v2. But just as the Spirit of God then moved upon the face of the waters, God's love still reaches out to our self-destructive race. *Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.*

December 25<sup>th</sup> (Christmas Day)

John 1 v1

*In the beginning was the Word.*

The first chapter of St John's Gospel is the traditional Gospel for Christmas Day. There is also a tradition of priests reading it after celebrating the Eucharist. It is a phenomenal reading and it quite deliberately echoes the Creation story in Genesis. God is love and love needs someone to be loved and to love in return. Love involves communication, which is not so different a word from communion. God is love relating to love in the three persons of the Trinity. As love is the opposite of self, God's love flows out from Himself, from the three persons of the Trinity, to create Heaven and earth. *By the Word of the LORD* were the heavens made. We are very special as created beings made in the image of the Creator. *Common Worship* justifiably calls us *the crown of all creation* (Eucharistic Prayer G). This baby human being whose birth in a stable we celebrate today is God's Word made flesh, God outpouring Himself in love, sharing our humanity.

December 26<sup>th</sup> (St Stephen)

John 1 vv1&2

*And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

First of all people experienced Jesus. Mary bore Him. Joseph was present in the stable and later shepherds and wise men. Throughout His life on earth people encountered Jesus – school friend, neighbour, fellow worshipper, teacher, healer, crucified Messiah, risen from the dead. Others came to know Jesus through the witness of the His disciples, by reputation and, later on, the New Testament. People have come to know Jesus through the Holy Spirit. We have come to know Him in the fellowship of the Church, in prayer and in the Sacraments.

People come to know Jesus and then we ponder on our experience. Who is Jesus? He is the Word of God? And what is the Word? John knew that the Word was with God. Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Unlike us, He did not come into existence at His conception. Jesus is in all eternity. This is Who this Jesus is, the human being from Nazareth we know and know about, the One Who sends the Holy Spirit, Who in turn bears witness of Jesus to our spirit.

As we celebrate the Birth of Mary's Son, we celebrate the Incarnation of the Son of God.

December 27<sup>th</sup> (St John the Evangelist)

John 1 v3

Today is the Patronal Festival at Higham. For some churches it is a bit of a problem to have a Patronal Festival this week. People have had enough of church with all the lead up to Christmas and Christmas itself. They are relaxing, still spending time with family, off for a few days' break or attending the sales. Attendances tend to be a bit thin and we have the same problem on the Sunday after Christmas – especially if the weather has turned a bit inclement. Some churches give up in the face of low numbers, though I always maintain that the indifference of the many doesn't detract from the faithfulness of the few and carry on regardless. There are always the angels and archangels at our services even if there aren't many people. And yet, all things were made through, by and for this babe in the manger. In the Eucharist today we shall remember that the Son of God died for us and share His Risen Body in the consecrated Bread. A question of priorities?

*In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*

Today is the day we commemorate the deaths of the baby boys whom Herod ordered to be killed because he feared that Jesus would take his throne. It is reminiscent of the deaths of the Hebrew boy children killed on Pharaoh's orders in the time of Moses and indeed of the deaths of the Egyptian firstborn in the last plague. There is a reference too to deaths in Bethlehem and all the villages around Jerusalem during the Babylonian invasion. As we remember these representative massacres we might think of war situations in the world today and throughout human history. We might think of street children and runaways and neglected or abused children in their own homes. There is plenty of material for prayer and there are plenty of opportunities for charitable giving.

*The wages of sin is death.* Most, if not all, of these tragedies are the result of human sin, our rebellion against God and His perfect law of love. So how is Jesus life in these situations?

Christian teaching would teach us not to perpetrate these evils.

Christian teaching would inspire the downtrodden to stand up for what is right.

Christian teaching would comfort and sustain the downtrodden. Knowing Christ would support people with little to hope for in this world.

The work of the Holy Spirit would be to move the perpetrators of these iniquities to repentance.

Christ would work with those who are fighting for justice.

Christ would work with those who are trying to relieve human need.

There is a judgment. The sinned against will be vindicated. The unrepentant sinners will be condemned. Those sinners who repent will find their peace in Christ.

December 29<sup>th</sup>

John 1 v5

Candles are a popular adjunct to worship. In fact one has to be careful not to have too many services with candles because a too familiar ritual too easily becomes a meaningless ritual. We go for Christingles at Christmas and at an Easter Midnight at Easter. We also hand out candles at Baptisms. We light the Paschal Candle at funerals. And just occasionally we have a procession at Candlemas. Light is a powerful symbol. We may be afraid of the dark. We can't find our way in the dark. We stumble over things. The Paschal Candle at Easter and at funerals stands for Christ, the Light of the World, risen from the tomb. The powers of death and darkness are overcome in Him. At Baptisms, Christingles and again at the Easter Midnight, we each have candles, illuminated by the Light of Christ. We walk in His light. We light up the world for other people. We share His light. Light is a powerful symbol. Jesus is the Light of the world. The Church is the light of the world.

Jesus is the Light Who shines in the darkness and what follows is ambiguous (which may or may not be apparent in the English translation you are using). *The darkness comprehended it not.* This has two possible meanings, both of them correct. The darkness cannot overcome the light. The darkness does not understand the light. People will not approach the Light. So many of our pews are empty. Yet they cannot overcome the Light. Persecution only makes the Church grow.

December 30<sup>th</sup>

John 1 v6

Witness is essential. Jesus is the faithful witness (Revelation 1 v5). The Greek word for witness is martyr. If the opposite of love is self, the supreme act of love is the surrender of self. The ultimate outpouring of the Love of God is the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the faithful witness, the faithful martyr. He shows us what love really is so that we might know God and live. He shows us what love really is so that we might die to self and live in Him. Dead to sin and alive to God in Christ we are inevitably faithful witnesses. *For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again.* (II Corinthians 5 vv 14&15)

We began these notes with God saying *Let there be light* and there was light. Light was the first thing God created and I tried to argue that the way modern science understands the world light is fundamental to the creation of everything else. Everything is composed of matter/energy, conveniently summed up as light. The material universe could be said to consist of light. Light shines in the darkness of space. Light coalesces into matter where otherwise there would be nothing. The material universal is incredibly marvellous, awesome. Humanity can't learn too much science. The more we know, the more we know there is to know, and the more we know there is to know, the more awed we must be. If we are wise, we are inspired to worship by what we know of the created order. What I wrote on 27<sup>th</sup> December about Jesus as the One through Whom, by Whom and for Whom everything was created ought to be enough to get people away from the "January" sales and into church, on their knees or lifting holy hands to heaven.

And yet there is more. All the wonders of the world are a mere shadow, a foretaste. Heaven is infinitely more wonderful than earth, the spiritual than the material. Yet Jesus says, *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away*. We are promised new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him*. The awe we feel when we contemplate the natural, material universe does no more than point us in the direction of the final consummation in Christ, the Light of the World – though we do receive a pledge and a foretaste in the Holy Communion, another reason why people might more wisely attend the St John's Day Eucharist than go to the sales!

Baptismal fonts are traditionally eight sided. The week of Creation leads to the infinitely more wonderful new Creation. The Sabbath rest on the day after Good Friday is followed by the first day of the week on which He rises gloriously from the dead. We are born again, adopted as His children, coheirs with Christ, inheritors of the Kingdom of God, born to life eternal. God's plan is worked out in the Bible story.

*A second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came.*



