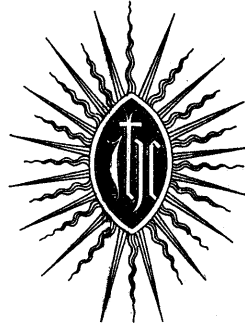


**THE TRADITIONAL ANGLICAN CHURCH  
PROVISIONAL PARISH OF ST. LUKE, AMPHILL**

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**Christmas 30/12/07**

*“In the beginning”* (John 1.1).

No Christmas would be complete without the archbishop trying to explain and the interviewer tying him in knots on a flat-footed literalist basis. We may be thankful that Cranmer left us with today's gospel, which is obviously *not* a simple story but an analysis of God's dealing with his world.

Christmas is a new initiative by God, but we will not understand it without the background of God's continuous way with man. St. John uses a few ideas and their opposites to express the situation. “Word” is God's expression of himself towards the world he created. It says in the psalms “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, the whole array of them by the breath of his mouth.” We can see at once that “word” is opposed to noise, as order to chaos (and God expresses himself by that one Word which is his son - contrast the many words delivered by angels to make up the Jewish law). God made and sustains the world as an environment of order.

The second image is “light”, which is obviously opposed to darkness and blindness. God has never failed to keep his word, which is light, before his people; this is the truth of the Old Covenant (and it applies to “every man that cometh into the world”, even outside that Covenant). “The light shineth in darkness” - however difficult some times have been, it has never been true that “God and his saints slept”. That is a message of hope for us.

Indeed, the Pope has recently issued an encyclical on hope - you can find it on the Internet, and it is worth reading, if a little wooden. Hope is a great truth of the faith; we do not despair of human life or assume that nothing of importance can be changed. Darkness may be the condition in which we live, but that darkness will not triumph. We read of the Light that “the darkness comprehended it not”. The Greek is ambiguous; it might mean that the world of darkness cannot understand the light (for, since the Word is God's reason, that world is inherently unreason), or it might mean that it has not and will not overwhelm the light. Both possibilities are true.

The picture then is one of conflict ever since the fall between God expressing himself towards mankind and a world order which is at best unresponsive, at worst hostile. Our hope at all times is that God active by his Word is the stronger. Our hope particularly at this time is that his Word has not merely been spoken at the world, his light not merely shone upon it, but that the conflict has been carried right into enemy territory.

The Word is the stronger, and the paradox of Christmas is that He remains stronger even as a helpless child, incapable of speech. We believe that Jesus was completely human - nothing else would save us - and yet that his humanity was taken up into that very life of God which could not cease to be exercised towards the created world, or it would fall into chaos.

The Word “dwelt among us”. Two Old Testament images are implied. One is the Tent of Meeting, where God encounters his people. The other is the way God's Wisdom pitches her tent among the chosen people. And the Word “was made flesh”. Now “flesh” in John is usually used of humanity, indeed the created order, as in revolt against God. So the coming of Jesus into the world both fulfils Old Covenant patterns and is an invasion of hostile territory. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not”.

So Christmas reveals the situation for what it is; darkness and conflict, and yet God-given hope for believers “as many as received him, power to become the sons of God, even to those that believe on his name”.

*The readings are for Christmas itself: Hebrews 1 ; John 1.1-14.*

*We next meet on January 13th and February 24th.*