



John 1.1-9
Matthew 2.1-12
2nd January 2022

God pitched his tent among us...

It may be less poetic, but I rather like one way of reading a verse from today's passage not as *The Word became flesh*, but *God pitched his tent and made a home among us*.

Two years ago, most of us hadn't heard of Zoom or Teams. Yet, when restrictions were at their height these virtual platforms became a precious means of communication. They have enabled so much and we are grateful for a form of technology that kept an unhealthy sense of isolation at bay.

And yet there were times when I heard people say things like: *let's leave that decision till we can meet in person*, or *we'll take another look at that when we can actually gather around a table*.

As we emerged from total lockdown we became familiar with an option that just a few months before would have mystified us; that of either meeting 'on-line' or 'in-person'.

In the story of our faith it's that second option that stands front and centre on Christmas Day.

It's as if God leaves behind the 'virtual' and embraces that 'in-person' revelation of himself we call The Incarnation.

God pitched his tent and made his home among us.

This first chapter of John's gospel will have been the climactic reading at thousands of carol services last month.

John invokes an ancient concept in this first chapter. The idea of God being the eternal Word that speaks truth and creativity into the universe. Sounds like a big idea, doesn't it? And for ancient thinkers it was encapsulated in the word *Logos*. And *logos* is very close to that other

ancient image of God as *Wisdom*.

It's understandable to think of God as beyond us and something 'other'. Yet, as he begins to write his gospel, John pens the idea that the Wisdom, the great Logos at the centre of all things, actively sought out companionship among human beings. So, we are back at that somewhat 'inadequate' yet potentially profound phrase that: *God pitched his tent among us...*

Let's for a moment linger with this idea that God's DNA, God's Wisdom, God's Logos is to be found at the centre of all things.

John starts his gospel with a sentence that seems like a conundrum: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God and the Word was with God and through him were all things created.*

When we push language this far in attempting to describe the indescribable we inevitably make a shift from prose to poetry.

John chapter one says creation is, as it were, shot through with God's wisdom. And, maybe that, for some people, is why they feel *closer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth.*

The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the earth his handiwork, sang the Psalmist.

Nature's rhythm thrills and sustains us. And in our often constantly frantic lives we would do well to appreciate the wisdom found in the trees and fields. The fingerprints of God in creation.

That DNA, we believe, has also been revealed to us through words of scripture. Through Torah, Psalms, Gospels and Epistles.

That's why, at the end of the readings in church, we say: *In this is the Word of the Lord.* As we read scripture, we prayerfully listen out for God's voice speaking to us. And isn't that a mind-blowing idea that God somehow speaks to me in the ideas, stories and songs of the bible. That God somehow reveals truth through words. Our elders carry the bible into church and place it in the pulpit every

week. It's an action which, in a way, becomes a prayer. And our prayer is that we will grow, as individuals and as a community, as people shaped by the bible.

But, of course, the best understanding of Logos, for Christians, is to think of Jesus that way. Logos means Word – probably best written with a capital W. So that's why we have John chapter one at our carol services: *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.*

Jesus is the Word and Wisdom of God made real as a human being. As Luther says, that's the way God 'consoles' us, finally and wonderfully speaking to us in a life we can understand and appreciate, the life of our Lord.

Our second reading today, in preparation for Epiphany on Thursday, spoke of Wise Men.

These too were Seekers after Truth as they travelled across moor and mountain following yonder star.

It's a wonderful idea, a colourful and moving picture of sincere people with enquiring, somewhat restless minds, searching for the Wisdom that is both at the centre of the universe and now rests as a baby in a manger full of hay.

Wisdom is worth searching for even if it takes some looking.

The Wise Magi are such an inspiration because of their openness to truth. In a story that is somewhat dominated by the idea that God spoke through a particular nation, Israel, it's thrilling to have the narrative broadened out with the inclusion of the Wise Men from The East, from Persia, from another country and a different culture. Suddenly Christmas becomes truly inter-national. For everyone.

We all have different starting places when it comes to faith. The important thing is, how did Jesus put it, have we got *ears to hear*. I think one of the best bits of the Magi story is that they ended up in a very different place to the one they anticipated when they started their journey. With open minds and hearts, they went where they were led, to a baby instead of a prince, to a humble home rather than an opulent palace. Truth led them to

Wisdom.

Well, these are deep themes for the first Sunday of the year; The Word and Wisdom of God among us.

So, in closing I want to use a really simple illustration.

I enjoy watching The Repair Shop on TV. People bring their battered heirlooms in to be repaired by wonderfully talented craftsmen and women.

Around the beginning of Advent, I watched an episode when a much loved, and now fragile, stuffed toy owl found its way onto the repairer's bench. Its owner loved the fact that her granny tried to repair it years ago and she wanted these stitches left in.

What to do? Well, the talented repairer made a sort of duplicate owl which went in the original, and it was this inner owl that was stuffed and gave the new required strength and stability. The finished repair was great. The outside was smartened up, but still looked familiar with granny's stitching in place. Yet with a new inner core the owl could once again stand on its own and looked and felt strong and secure.

That picture speaks to me and becomes my prayer for 2022. That God may come and fill me, in my innermost being, with his Word and Wisdom. May he pitch his tent in my life. So that, however battle scared I may be on the outside, I may have that inner strength, joy, peace and love that comes from the living and loving presence of God within.

May it be so for us all as we walk together into this New Year as Seekers after God's truth and wisdom.

Amen.

Ian Green, Amersham, 27th December 2021