

Luke 2:1-20 Christmas Eve midnight HC

Two of the most overused words this year have been the words '**unprecedented**' and '**extraordinary**'. It has certainly been that sort of year, different, strange, challenging, very difficult for many, new opportunities for others, a year like no other, and one we don't want to see repeated...

I wonder whether your Christmas will be an ordinary or extraordinary one, it will certainly be different, with 'bubbles' and caution.

We could say that **the Christmas story** is the story of **ordinary** people and ordinary events. A young woman who was engaged to be married, had a baby, another mouth to feed, a new life to cherish. Working folk, shepherds, looking after their sheep on a hillside. Wise men studying to gain more knowledge and wisdom.

These events could be today, these things take place all over the world.

These were all ordinary, normal people, like you and me.

Yet we remember their story 2,000 years later, and we celebrate with real joy.

When Jesus was born *there were important things* taking place at that time. Decrees of Emperors, wars, power struggles, famine, even the introduction of a '*poll tax*', and people were worried about the state of the world.

But it is not these events, important at the time, that we recall and celebrate; they are now the dust of history. But we do remember a few ordinary, insignificant people in a small unpretentious village in Palestine, that far flung corner of the Roman Empire.

What makes these people and events so memorable and so special?

In 2020 we saw ordinary people doing extraordinary things, NHS, care and key workers going far beyond the call of duty to care for others, neighbours looking after those nearby..

But the Christmas story is more than this, it is about ordinary people whose lives were ***touched by God***, when something ***truly unprecedented*** really happened. It is where the human meets the divine.

Mary was a young woman, engaged to Joseph, going about her normal life, when a messenger from God, an **angel**, came to her. Mary was afraid, troubled, and struggled to understand the angel's message, but eventually responded, '*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word*'. Mary said 'yes' to God, to bear God's child. Joseph, a carpenter, getting on quietly with his life, finds his fiancé pregnant, and ponders what to do. An angel came to Joseph also, to reveal the nature of this baby. And Joseph too said 'yes' to God.

Shepherds going about their daily work, herding the sheep, when an angel appears.

They are terrified, but listen and respond, and go straight away into Bethlehem to see what God has done. Wise Men far away, studying the stars, find a brilliant new star, and God, through their study, reveals that a new King has been born, and so they follow the star.

And when all these ordinary people responded to God, said '*yes, I will follow where you lead*', we see the **extraordinary results**, something ***truly unprecedented***:

Mary gave birth to Jesus, God's own Son, God in human form, and bursts into a song of praise and wonder at God's goodness to her. Joseph was full of wonder, and willing to trust God for whatever lay in store for the future. '*The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen*'. The Wise Men '*were overwhelmed with joy... and they knelt down and worshipped .. and offered him gifts.*'

And more than this, they enabled Jesus, the Saviour of the world, to come among us, and to receive the worship and adoration that is his due.

If we, ordinary people, say 'Yes' to God, '*I will follow where you lead*', then we too may find ourselves full of praise and joy and wonder, and our Christmas will truly be **extraordinary**.

And what is more, then Jesus will again find lips to speak through, hands to work with, and a heart to show his love, and he will receive the worship and adoration that he deserves.

It's what Christmas is really all about.