

Christmas Message from the Bishop of Burnley

Have you ever been to a 'Messy Church'? It's a different kind of church where young children and their parents can play, have fun and worship together.

I recently attended a fantastic Christmas Messy Church at St James' Lower Darwen and the place was packed with children who were ridiculously over-excited because Christmas is coming.

And what's great is that the excitement does not end with the children. It's like an infectious disease. It seems that the adults are catching the excitement bug and going crazy themselves!

Jesus says in the Bible that we all need to become like little children if we are to enter the Kingdom of heaven. It's a funny thing to say in many ways. I personally am glad to have left behind school rules, bossy parents and short trousers. But I think that when Jesus spoke those words, he was describing a child's capacity to wonder.

Messy Church is full of the wonder of the childhood – there is wonder at the activities they are engaged in, there is wonder at the deliciousness of the supper that is soon to be served. But above all there is wonder at the child born in the stable, wonder that in Jesus God has come to share in our life.

And that wondering takes us to the heart of the Christmas story. Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men, all these people are filled with wonder when they see the child of Bethlehem. God has come to earth.

The God who is everywhere has come to be somewhere. God has come to share our human life so that we can share in the life of heaven. Wonder is the only possible reaction. As we get older we lose our capacity for wonder. We think we've seen it all before. Trees, Santa, cards, presents, carols.

Been there, done that, bought the T-shirt. We need to learn from our children. We need to learn and imitate their wonder, their capacity to imagine, their joyfulness.

This Christmas then, try and recover something of the child within you. When you gaze into the stable, try and shut off that cynical adult mind.

Look at the child Jesus as if for the very first time. That is God, born for you, God with you.

God has come to share your life. If you fear being lonely this Christmas, God is with you.

If you're weighed down by grief, God is with you. If you're struggling with debt, God is with you in Jesus. If you're in pain, God is with you and he will not let you go.

And what's more, as he shares your life, you can share his life. As he comes to be with us, so we can be with him. All that is at odds with human flourishing; all that stifles our joy has been defeated, because Jesus is born.

This Christmas remember that.

God is with you.

So be lost in wonder, love and praise.

Happy Christmas.