

WEEKLY SERMON

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The paradox of the Christmas story

There was a great paradox on Christmas night.

A short distance from the little town of Bethlehem a group of shepherds witnessed some astounding, awesome and memorable events.

First, the dazzling glory of the Lord flood-lit a hillside and second, a heavenly host gave praise to God.

And yet these were not the most remarkable events of that night. The event of incomparable significance was the birth of a baby in a shed down in the town. But to look at him he was nothing exceptional – he was a new-born baby and appeared to be just like millions of other babies.

One of our best-loved carols captures the unremarkable, undramatic nature of the event. 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' speaks of the town being in 'deep and dreamless sleep' – oblivious to what was happening.

And yet in the birth of that baby the 'everlasting Light' was shining into Bethlehem – and into the world.

So, the paradox of Christmas Night was that the truly glorious was to be found in the very ordinary.

Similarly, if you're to be a Christian, you'll find that you need to experience a paradox in your own heart: God's greatest blessings are to be found when you're least full of yourself. To put it another way, you're most full when you're most empty.

Below you'll find part of a prayer written by a Church of England clergyman called Arthur Bennett. It's based on the meditations of Puritan Christians who lived in England in previous centuries. Please read the words thoughtfully and prayerfully and they will help you find that God is most exulted in your heart when you yourself feel least exulted:

Let me learn by paradox

that the way down is the way up,
that to be low is to be high,
that the broken heart is the healed heart,
that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,
that the repenting soul is the victorious soul,
that to possess nothing is to possess all,
that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,
that to give is to receive,
that the valley is the place of vision.*

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* The Valley of Vision (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975)

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