

## Homily Christmas 2021

When we look at our world this Christmas there is cause for great sadness: a global pandemic which has taken the lives of so many leaving their loved ones to weep and mourn their passing; a refugee crisis bigger than that of World War II; starvation in Yemen and Afghanistan where children are dying daily; prejudice and discrimination of every type; the respect for life dwindling as cases of abuse and killing of innocent children become more frequent on our evening news bulletins. When people ask, 'Why does a good loving God allow this?', I too am left with no response.

However, instead of trying to answer such a question with arguments from Augustine or Aquinas I turned this week to the wisdom of Holy Scripture: the known world, at the time of Christ's birth, was in the grip of an often cruel and murderous Roman occupation; Mary and Joseph were forced migrants, refugees who eventually had to flee the atrocities of Herod's rule to the safety of Egypt; many children, mainly infants and toddlers, slain, at the hands of Jewish soldiers, in The Massacre of the Innocents; prejudice and discrimination rife with Samaritans, lepers, tax collectors and women in particular frequent victims.

God, instead of giving us answers as to the 'why' of the apparent hopelessness of the times of Augustus Caesar, simply sends His only begotten Son, an innocent victim of circumstances, to bring us HOPE and PEACE. No philosophising, no making excuses, no justifying, no defending God's all knowing, all powerful infinite love but just the appearance on the world stage of a 'baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger'. God in our 'messiness' intervenes to 'make a difference' to our seemingly hopeless lives and bring us 'news of great JOY' in the middle of the great sadness which envelopes the people.

As it was 2000 years ago so it is today. The Child Jesus quietly enters the cold darkness and seeming hopelessness of the global inn and into the personal tragedies, suffering and worries of each of us. There He lights, within our hearts, a candle of HOPE for our world and offers each of us PEACE and Gospel JOY: 'Do not be afraid. I have overcome the world.' and in the words of the medieval mystic St Julian of Norwich whispers gently into our ears, 'All will be well, all manner of things will be well.'

So this morning when I got up the switching on of the candle behind the crib had so much more significance than ever before. Lighting up the lowly birthplace of a babe who doesn't offer answers to the great philosophical questions of life but a babe offering us HOPE, PEACE and JOY in the midst of the human 'messiness' of our often, misguided world.