

## ***From the Vicar***

Christmas is nearly upon us! For me as December approaches, it can with very mixed feelings. It will in the end be a very joyful time, but before that there is a very busy time of service preparation and all that goes with it.

I do hope all of you will make every effort to get to Church this Christmas – whether at the Parish Church or one of our sister churches in Rainford. It is a matter of recognising what lies at the heart of the matter – that God, in the infant Jesus, so loved the world that he gave his only Son into our hands. The heart of the matter is intensely holy.

The baby in the manger can be just a Christmas decoration, a sentimental thing on the edge of what is otherwise about family reunions, combined with an over-indulgence in food and drink (*mea culpa!*). That is still good fun, but it is only ‘secular’ Christmas. I want to invite everybody to explore the spiritual heart of the matter! I invite you to use your imagination, and see yourself there on that holy night in Bethlehem. Where are you in that scene, that wonderful time around the Bethlehem stable? If you are over the horizon, consider creeping closer to have a look. If you are on the edge of the stable’s light, consider coming into the warmth of God’s love. If you are like a wondering shepherd, consider that this Son of God is given into *your* hands. If you are like a wise man, are you moved to give your gift to Him, the gift of your allegiance?

Our Christian claim is no less than this: on that moment in Bethlehem no less than the destiny of the whole creation is poised. For in the child Jesus the way is opened to come to the Father, to allow him to bring back to life the parts of us that were dead, in the new life of the Holy Spirit of God. Christmas is not just about recognising the Son of God in the Bethlehem manger – it is also about finding out who we are as well, and coming fully alive.

Graham Kendrick, a modern hymn writer, wrote these words:

*From heav’n you came, helpless babe,  
entered our world, your glory veiled;  
not to be served but to serve  
and give your life that we might live.*

*This is our God, the Servant King,  
he calls us now to follow him,  
to bring our lives as a daily offering  
of worship to the Servant King.*

In Church, we shall sing them at midnight on Christmas Eve. Come and sing too. Come to worship our Lord this Christmas. Come closer to the Bethlehem stable. Find out who you are.

*Blessings,*

Stephen