



Christmas Message Transcript – 2023

One of the phrases that many of us will have been using in our daily prayer throughout Advent is the petition, *'Reveal among us the light of your presence, that we may behold your power and glory.'*

There's an inherent longing here to see the light of Christ amidst the stuff of daily life; a desire for God to open our eyes, today and every day, that we behold his presence.

The message of Christmas tells us that we see the God's light shining most fully in the birth of a baby; Mary's boy-child. It's here, in the manger, in that tiny scrap of humanity, that we see most clearly God's power and glory.

Whilst the message has a particularity about it – the birth of Jesus, it shows us something fundamentally important about how God is at work in the world; through creation; through human relationships. It's often through the small, sometimes hidden things that make up our lives, that God reveals the light of his presence to us. It's through everyday human experience – ours and that of others - that we catch a glimpse of God's power and glory.

Earlier this week, I went to a carol service at the prison in Usk. About 30 or more of us joined the prisoners to listen to the Christmas story and sing some Christmas carols. Some of you watching this video will have been there. I found it extraordinarily moving to sit in that hall with those men and hear the message of Christmas in that context. And because we were there, in that place, the story took on an added poignancy: the story of the fall and of human beings giving in to temptation; the story of hope proclaimed by the prophets that God would send someone to save us from ourselves; the story of a miraculous birth, the Word made flesh who reveals to us the life and light of the eternal God and yet whose coming is hidden, unannounced except to a few outcasts and foreigners.

There was joy and hope and gratitude in the hearts of the men we gathered with. We heard it in their singing – and gosh, can't they sing! We saw it in their

courage as about 12 of them stood and sang solo parts in a simple but beautiful Litany written by Bernadette Farrell. We experienced it in the fun we had together as we sang – with actions – the 12 days of Christmas.

Afterwards, there was a chance to meet and have conversation together over drinks and mince pies. I heard from one man how his faith had been rekindled through being in prison. I heard how another had been leading his friend, gently but firmly to the Lord and the impact this man's growing faith was having on both of them. I heard stories from volunteers who go into the prison regularly with their therapy dogs and others who are prison visitors. Some have been faithfully visiting the same men for years, offering companionship, a listening ear, hope and comfort through their words and their presence.

In it all, and rather unexpectedly, I found myself being ministered to, moved by the faith and hope of the men and, not least, their vulnerability. The nativity scene which stood in the centre of the hall that night took on a fresh meaning for me. It was, as someone reflected as we left, a privilege to have been there.

I hope and pray that over these next days as we celebrate the birth of our Saviour, whether you're alone or with family, whether it's quiet or wonderfully chaotic, and however you're feeling, God will reveal to you something of the light of his presence; that even in the small and hidden things, you behold God's power and his glory.