

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson for **Christmas 2021**

Along the bus route out of Jerusalem towards Bethlehem are the ruins of a very ancient church built in the Byzantine period about 1,500 years ago. An interesting location if you were travelling from Nazareth via Jerusalem to Bethlehem, as Mary and Joseph did, for this would be the spot where you would walk uphill and catch your first glimpse of Bethlehem.

The church was built there on the theory that it would have been a logical place for weary travellers to stop and take a little rest, now that their goal was in sight.

Today is a time when we can catch a glimpse of Bethlehem and its promise, stepping aside for a little while on our pilgrim journey through life.

Advent comes to a close, but the Advent candles are still lit.

Or are they?

I'm indebted to the Catenians who have shared with me a moving reflection on the four candles and thoughts of the world we are in. Some years we may have thought of the candles as representing the prophets or Isaiah, John the Baptist, angels, shepherds. At least for the past two years, CAFOD have provided us with a prayer for each week on themes of **HOPE, LOVE, JOY, PEACE**

The reflection says: Four candles slowly burned. The ambience was so soft, One could almost hear them talking.

The first candle said: "I am Peace" "The world is full of anger and fighting. Nobody can keep me lit, and out it went.

The second candle said: "I am Faith" "I am no longer indispensable. It doesn't make sense that I stay lit another moment" and out it went.

Sadly **the third candle began to speak: "I am love!"** "People don't understand my importance so they simply put me aside. They even forget to love those who are nearest to them." And waiting no longer, Love's flame went out.

Suddenly... a child entered the room and saw the three unlit candles. She said: **"Why aren't you burning? You're supposed to stay until the end."** And saying this, the child began to cry.

Then **the fourth candle answered: "Don't be afraid: I am Hope"** "While I am still burning we can relight the other candles."

With shining eyes the child took the candle of hope and lit the other candles. **"The Greatest of These is Love...** but the flame of hope should never go out of your life.

With Hope each of us can live with Peace, Faith and love

Prayer: Dear God, You are my light and salvation. You are my hope. Please come into my heart, forgive all my wrongs and give me Your wonderful gift of eternal life. Help me to be an instrument of Your love and cause Your light to shine on others through me. Amen.

Canon Philip Dyson