

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson. (Christmas Mystery)

2nd January 2022 - 2nd Sunday after the Nativity, and 'Mary, Mother of God' (1st Jan)

Readings (Year C): 1st: Ecclesiasticus 24:1-2. 8-12. Psalm: 147. 2nd: Ephesians 1:3-6. 15-18. Gospel: John 1:1-18.

'Time has not solved the mystery of creation' so wrote the Astronomer Royal, Lord Martin Rees 4 years ago today. He also said: 'Now is the time of year we resolve to use our time better in the time to come. Time is a precious commodity. We can gain or lose it. We can save, spend or waste it.' And as we know 'time and tide wait for no man.'

So the antiphon for Benedictus at Morning Prayer on 1st January for Mary, Mother of God, struck me anew:

'Today a wonderful mystery is announced: something new has taken place: God has become man; he remained what he was and has become that which he was not; and though the two natures remain distinct he is one.'

Over the Christmas Masses three of the gospel writers tell us about what it is we are celebrating. St John on Christmas Morning, repeated tomorrow/today expresses the mystery in one short sentence, 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,' which we Catholics recall three times a day in the Angelus:

None of us will ever really be able to fathom completely the meaning of the Incarnation; the Son of God being born as a human. It is mystery. 3 of Cardinal Hume's books have the titles: the Mystery of the Incarnation: the Mystery of the Cross, the Mystery of Love, and I'm mindful that following the gospel at Midnight Mass our choir sing a very short antiphon which comes from Christmas Matins 'O magnum mysterium': O great mystery, and wondrous sacrament that animals should see the new born Lord, lying in their manger: Blessed is the Virgin whose womb was worthy to bear the Lord Jesus Christ.' O great mystery.

Cardinal Nichols in his New Year message writes "At this time of Christmas and the New Year, I often think of the remarkable words of St John Eudes, a 17th –century French priest, ordained an Oratorian and renowned for the missions he preached cross France. The words which lodge in the Cardinal's mind are; "The mysteries of Jesus are not yet completely perfected and fulfilled. They are complete, indeed, in the person of Jesus, but not in us, who are his members, nor in the Church which is his mystical body." He explains: "The Son of God desires us to perfect the mystery of his Incarnation and birth by forming himself in us. He intends to perfect the mysteries of his passion, death and resurrection, by causing us to suffer, die and rise again with him and in him, and he will cause us to live a glorious eternal life with him and in him in heaven." (From *A Treatise on the Kingdom of Jesus*.)

Cardinal Vincent continues 'Here is the sweep of our salvation, of our earthly pilgrimage, its shape and purpose. The more we recognise this truth, the more readily we can live in peace and with a confident poise and intent. And it begins at Christmas. This feast is the beginning of the story of God's decisive intervention into our reality. And it is a doorway through which everyone can enter. No one is excluded and no one will find the image of the helpless child too over bearing or out of reach.

Indeed as is symbolised in the low door at the entrance to the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the mighty must come down off their "high horses" and stoop to enter on foot. In order to receive this Saviour, we must open our hearts in simplicity and humility, so that, in his lowliness, he can enter and begin to form himself in us. Like Mary, we must become a place of his dwelling so that we have him where ever we go, on every step of our daily journey.

Perhaps we can gaze on the figure of Mary for a while, seeing how she is always pointing to her son, bringing our gaze to him, wanting to introduce us to him. This, too, is our mission in every circumstance, a mission to be carried out with the gentleness and love which she embodies,' and with those Advent candles of Peace, Faith, Love and Hope lit within us.

Canon Philip Dyson