

Midnight Mass 2018

A child approaches the vicar at the end a crib service.

'What happens to the baby now?'

'Well, he grows up, and becomes a wonderful man, filled with God,
and does wonderful things and shows us what God's kingdom is all about'

replies the Vicar (quite pleased with himself at managing to scrape some theology
together on Christmas Eve)

Blank silence from child and mother.

'She means the dolly in the crib'.

Explains the mother, matter of factly.

'Oh that!, well I think it gets put back in a cupboard till next year.'

'BACK IN A CUPBOARD!'

The child's lip begins to tremble.

'You can't leave him in a cupboard. All year. In the dark.'

Silence.

The vicar racks his brains.

How to prevent Christmas nightmares and broken dreams.

Inspiration strikes. He bends to take the figure of the Christ child out of the crib,

Hands it to the girl.

'If you promise to look after him very carefully throughout the year, and bring him
back in time for this service next year, he's yours.'

The child made the link between the plaster figure and the real infant it represented.
And of course, when you do that, leaving it in a dark cupboard all year is unthinkable.

Holding, caring for, being responsible for a child brings out the best,
and worse,
in human beings.

We are filled with wonder at the length that parents will go to protect their children;
Shocked by stories of neglect, abuse, cruelty on the news.

'I can't stand children' said a woman to me in my last church.

'why?'

'because they can see straight through you.'

Exactly, straight to the heart of you.

Straight to the heart of what matters:

From the most basic of needs; food, warmth, comfort, dependence on you,
to strident demands for fairness, reliability, truth, authenticity.

No wonder some are threatened by children,
some can't cope, discover terrible inner darkness,

Some discover, heroism, compassion, reservoirs of love, trustworthiness.

God seems to know what he's up to,

giving us a child to help us understand her love for us.

'I love you, you know,'

95 year old man this morning as I gave him his Christmas communion.

A former headmaster, now frail, his memory a bit clouded,

but still able to match me word for word on the first chapter of John.

'In the beginning was the Word...

...and the word was made flesh,'

His own flesh, failing now, keeping him bed bound,
But the simplicity of his joy,
following the cadences of the ancient phrases,
saying The Our Father,
A fragment of unleavened bread on his tongue.
A token of something much deeper, much more ancient and powerful
than any of us could ever imagine.
It released in him pure joy,
A kind of recognition.
Something childlike,
Of God.

If you have been fortunate enough to have children,
You will know the strength of the feelings aroused in you.
Powerful love and protectiveness,
The best and strongest you are capable of being.
And sometimes, when driven to the end of your tether,
Also the worst you are capable of being.

So it's no mistake, that God speaks to us in a child.
Not a voice out of a cloud,
Not a warrior king,
Not a gorgeous goddess on a shell,
But in the fragile vulnerability of a child.
God young, new born.

You and I are offered that child,
A gift,
To take care of throughout the coming year.
So will you nurture him.
hungry in his hungry brothers and sisters?
Cold in his homeless brothers and sisters?
Demanding justice in his oppressed brothers and sisters?
needing your love and attention in his frail, housebound, isolated brothers and
sisters?
And asking for your attention,
deep down inside you,
in the quiet places of your own soul,
where the child also waits for you?
Will you care for him, nurture him,
Love him?

He's not interested in how rich you are.....or poor.
How beautiful.....or plain.
How famous...Or unknown.
He doesn't need glittering shiny things.
A Porsche isn't much use to him.
Or your Louboutains...Or your Botox...
Your compassion, your care, the warmth of your heart.
That'll do.