

Trinity Church, North Finchley

Reflections used at the Candlelight Carol Service on 16 December 2018

The reflections were written by Revd Paul Martin

[The following reflection followed the reading of Isaiah 11.1-9]

Hope

This is hope for my everyday 'trivial me':

I hope that the tube will be running on time,
Please, when I'm on holiday, let the sun shine.
I dream of my football team winning the cup,
I hope that my salary keeps going up.

This is how my 'realist me' reflects on hope:

Why bother hoping when the world's such a mess?
It only adds to the strain and the stress.
It's two steps forward and three steps back,
Too often it feels like I'm under attack.

This is hope for 'socially-concerned me':

I long for an end to all discrimination,
I hope we can stop destroying creation,
I dream of a world where the hungry are fed,
Where the lonely find friends and the homeless a bed.

This is the 'thoughtful me' reflecting on hope:

All of that feels an impossible dream,
Reality's harsh, and our lives, it would seem,
Are all out of kilter, we can't get things right,
We live more in the darkness than we do in the light.

This is the 'me' that seeks to focus on Jesus:

In Jesus hope takes a radical turn,
In the shame of the manger love's light starts to burn,
It shines in humility, service, embrace,
It will not be snuffed out on the cross of disgrace.
Love bears with the worst that reality throws,
And unleashes a spirit where hope grows and grows.

[The following reflection followed the reading of Luke 1.26-38]

Faith

'Let it be to me as you have said.'

What is this faith that seemed to overwhelm me?
To take me unawares,
provoking me into such open-ended promises?

This faith that is my answer to God's gracious approach,
now asks more questions of me and in me.

What is this unknown way of open trust
that now defines me, shapes me, takes hold of me?
Is my body mine or is it his?
Have I been invaded or enfolded?
Have I been taken over or set free?
By these words did I take control or lose control?
Will this path mean shame or honour?
Is this me at work in God, or God at work in me?
Is it one or other?
Or perhaps it is all of this ... and more.

And in this new life of faith,
who gives birth to whom?

And in the coming of God in me and through me,
will my birth pains be the end or just the beginning?

What is this faith that now overwhelms me?

[The following reflection followed the reading of Luke 2.8-16.]

Peace

Our peace was shattered ...
and all in the name of peace ... of shalom ...

Peace is a quiet night on the hills,
a night without predators and rustlers,

a night without stragglers and strays,
a night of comradery and contemplation.

'Peace on earth' they sang
... as they rudely interrupted our contentment.

Blinding light bursting through the darkness -
the beyond invading the here and now.
All hell breaking loose ...
except that it was heaven
making its dramatic entrance
and filling us with terror.

Peace disturbed
by the message of disturbing good news,
of a Saviour born ...
but an unconventional Saviour
lying in an unlikely manger.

Our attention was grabbed,
our interest piqued.
We could not hold back.
No more peace that night!

And so we ran
a noisy, motley band
breaking the soft silence
of the slumbering Bethlehem.

And we found him -
gently sleeping in his makeshift cradle ...
disrupting all of our thoughts
of how a Saviour comes,
of what a Redeemer looks like.

And if this is shalom –
a new world order of peace and harmony,
where the Saviour lies in a manger
and unkempt, unruly shepherds greet him –
then this is a gloriously disruptive peace.

And could we keep silent?
Common, working men to the core,
we praised God in the only raucous way we knew.
And broke the peace of Bethlehem.

A shattering, disturbing,
disruptive and raucous peace,
this 'Peace on Earth'.

[*The following reflection followed the reading of Matthew 2.1-12.*]

Worship

Globe-trotting
Boundary-crossing
Star-gazing
Truth-seeking -
Would-be worshippers

Assumption-making
Palace-visiting
Herod-disturbing
Prophet-guided -
Would-be worshippers

Bethlehem-headed
Bright star following
Village house finding
Carpenter's family visiting -
Would-be worshippers

Gold-bestowing,
Frankincense-giving,
Myrrh-anointing,
Knee-bending,
Worshippers

Obediently-following
Humble-hearted
Everything-offered
Jesus-focussed -
Worshippers

Drawn to the manger
from every nation
giving our all
love's adoration -
Worshippers