

Christmas Eve, December 24th, 2025

11.00 Holy Communion, All Saints Oakham

Isaiah 9.2-7, 15-18; Titus 2.11-14, Luke 2.1-20

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

It has to be said that the events that we commemorate tonight did not cause much of a stir when they happened. A child was born in a way no different from many others in one of the more obscure of Roman provinces. The circumstances were perhaps a bit unfortunate due to the number of people in the area at the time of the census, but nothing particularly out of the way. Its significance was communicated to some very odd people – a light show of angels to a scattered group of shepherds on a Judean hillside, and some rather esoteric Zoroastrian Magi or wise men several hundred miles away. They told others about what they had experienced of course, but the news didn't go far. It was like sending out a message over social media to a few folk with 25 followers each. The excitement quickly died down. The family remembered all that had happened of course, the stories told to them by the shepherds and the Magi, and in particular the angelic visions that accompanied the conception and birth of the child. No doubt the shepherds dined out on their story for the rest of their lives. And the Magi told those in authority in Judea before realising their mistake. But the event was largely forgotten as the years passed by.

The child was named Jesus, a form of Joshua, a very common name of the period, but with a startling meaning “God saves”, and he grew up in a typical artisan’s home in the northern province of Galilee. Around 30 years later, he began teaching and preaching a seditious message – that the kingdom of God was coming, and the message was accompanied by healings and miracles. He gathered together a small band of followers who accompanied him on his travels, and the number of his supporters grew and the news about him spread around Judea. And all these events did come to the attention of the authorities, who, to protect their own position, found it necessary to put a stop to what was becoming a popular movement. So the preacher was arrested and tried and, as was the Roman way, crucified. Job done. All would be forgotten in a few months and life would return to normal.

But that wasn’t what happened. It would seem that the greatest miracle of all was still to happen and the one who was crucified came back to life, energised his followers into preaching and teaching that the Messiah had come, a message that within decades had spread through the Roman Empire. And the number of followers had increased massively. And as his followers, old and new, pondered the stories of his birth, the teachings of Jesus, and their experience of him, whilst he was alive on this earth, and walking with them in their lives day by day, they began to piece together what it was all about. Firstly the events surrounding his birth, suggested that the message wasn’t aimed at the powerful and influential in Judea, but rather at the marginalised and powerless on one hand and at the

hated gentiles of non-Jews on the other, and they read the old prophecies in a new light and began to see in Jesus their fulfilment.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

They began to understand that the one that they followed was more than a man, a worker of wonders, but in some way God's promised Messiah, the one who, through his sacrificial death enabled the sins of men and women to be forgiven, and the way to heaven opened.. One of those who became a follower was a man named Paul, perhaps one of the most gifted theologians and philosophers who has ever lived, and he began to understand and communicate more deeply what the life, death and resurrection of Jesus had been about

He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

The creation of the church, a people for his own, to work for him here on earth.

A little later, perhaps 40 years after Jesus died, one of his disciples called John was to reflect further on who Jesus was and was to write the words that are so often read around this time of year.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Jesus, the crucified, risen Messiah was with God at the creation of all things, and all things were made through him. He is the light that shines on in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

So back to where we began. The event we celebrate now, insignificant as it appeared at the time, was the start of a much bigger story. And indeed it has become the focal point of the measurement of time used by the majority of the world, with years being measured from that event.

And that of course raises questions for us. Perhaps we come here tonight because that is what we always do, it is part of the holiday. We sing the carols because that is what generations before us have done in this place, we celebrate the feast because that is part of our history and heritage. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. But in a few days perhaps we will pack up the memories of this service tonight with the Christmas decorations, and put them back in the loft till next year. The Christmas story of stables, shepherds and wise men, a winter's tale, no more than that. But this year I would invite you to take a different path, the path that Jesus's followers took, to join us here at All Saints as we follow him through his life as he grew, to hear the words he preached, and see the signs that he performed. And in Holy Week to follow him through his arrest, his trial, his execution and experience the Easter joy of his resurrection and new life, and to take that new life for yourself. Let this little part of our annual celebrations lead on to something much more significant in our lives. This year, let this winter's tale grow to become a spring story of new life and joy.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen