


CHRISTMAS DAY A – ST MICHAEL’S, ABINGDON

25 December 2025



Isaiah 52.7-10 / Hebrews 1.1-4 / John 1.1-14

‘In plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion’

 In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – *Amen*

THE ANGELS, BLESS 'EM, have gone quiet. The shepherds are having a coffee 'round the corner and talking about their extraordinary night, on their way back to find their flocks. Joseph's relatives have settled down after all the commotion over the baby. The magi haven't gotten here yet, the cattle haven't woken up; the spare room is now full with father, mother, and child, and *someone* is snoring, *Joseph*. Last night the terrifying glory of the Lord shone around them, but today it's just plain old cloudy skies and actually a rather pleasant temperature, 16°. Just another plain day in Bethlehem.

For the next thirty years or so, 'plain' will be the only description we have of Jesus's life. All right, St Luke does tell us that he was a star student who stayed late after the festival to talk with the tutors and lecturers at the Temple, but doesn't *everyone* get excited at the prospect of spending an extra day talking with a common room full of theologians? Apart from that one scene, the Gospels tell us nowt of the years between Jesus's zero-th birthday and his baptism by John. People imagine those years as *mysterious*, as *esoteric*, as *hidden* years, but it would be fairer to our evidence to say that they were *ordinary* years in which Jesus did nothing memorable, nor did anything special happen to him.

Our worship of Jesus tends to suppress our recollection that the incar-

nation of the LORD God Almighty as *fully human* implies that — as with us — most of *his* days were entirely unmemorable. You wake up, saw a few planks, hammer a few pegs A into slots B, spend an hour or so searching for the hex wrench that came with the TV table you're assembling, from Ikea (which in Greek, ἱκηαι, is the 2nd person singular aorist subjunctive of the word ἰκνέομαι, meaning something like 'you may have arrived'). That's about as unusual as those days got: a shopping trip to a store whose name means 'you may have gotten here', every bit as uneventful as most of *our* days. That's an important part of what 'fully human' means.

This morning when *we* gather with *our* families and friends here, we do not expect any visible or audible angelic presences, nor shepherds, nor the imminent arrivals of astronomers from the east (presumably London, though perhaps Berlin, or Kyiv?), though all of them, all of *you*, would be most welcome. We don't expect a pillar of cloud by day, or a pillar of fire by night, or miraculous healings, or somebody rising from death. But the Incarnation reminds us that these aren't the *only* ways in which God's glory appears among us. 'In *many* and *various* ways God spoke of old to our fathers', including by way of prophets, wise teachers, righteous laws. And glorious as wise teachers may be, we — pardon, 'they' — are nothing that special. Even prophets weren't luminous semi-divine beings; they had messages from God, but were otherwise plain, ordinary people. Amos himself said, 'I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees.' And when they try to get God's message across to us, they most often just use words, but sometimes adopt political street theatre, running naked through town or eating food cooked over cow poo, or giving their children outlandish names (pity the poor school-teacher who has to call on Hosea's daughter Lo-Ruḥamah or Isaiah's son Maher-shalal-hash-baz every day, day on day). But they were otherwise very ordinary people, and Jesus himself was an ordinary baby; yet it is in that very *ordinariness* that Jesus reflects the glory of God and bears the very

stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. And it's among ordinary, fully human people such as Amos and Hosea, as Joseph and the shepherds and the teachers of the Law, that Jesus came among us as the light who shines from the beginning of the world to beyond its end.

We don't expect stunning revelations this morning, but we do expect that, as in the spare room in Bethlehem, if we pay *close attention* to that plain ordinary side of life, we will see more and more of the *divinity* that formed and inhabits every day. That pivot point between the ordinary and the divine appeared among us in Bethlehem, and appears to us *in him* every Sunday, every day we gather in Jesus's name to give thanks and praise to him, to the God who brought him into the world, and likewise to give honour to Mary, his extraordinary, ordinary mother. That pivot point between the ordinary and the divine appears among us wherever we offer up our sensibility toward divine things to a world in which the ordinary prevails. Some of our neighbours tease us for observing the Feast of the Nativity on the 25th of December, whereas we have no specific evidence for the date on which Jesus of Nazareth was born. But they're missing the point that, on the whole, it may as well have been the fifth of November, or the fourteenth of July (*quatorze juillet!*), or Bloomsday, the 16th of June. *Any* ordinary day will do; as we sang last Sunday evening, 'O holy child of Bethlehem / Descend to us, we pray. / Cast out our sin and enter in / Be born in us *today*'.

Among the snoring relatives, the tramped-down straw on the floor, the crumpled gift wrap, the absent noisy shepherds, in the midst of an ordinary day in Bethlehem *or in Abingdon*, 'Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion.'

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit —

Amen