

I wonder what you were expecting this evening, perhaps carols and mirth?
I wonder what you were expecting as you hear of Christ's birth?
I wonder if you were expecting the same as last year, carols a tradition, you always come here.
I wonder if you were expecting to feel challenged, uncomfortable even. A story that's true not simply fiction.

Revolution revealed in the carols we sing that this is Jesus, this baby who changes everything.

I wonder if you were expecting a baby, chubby and white, smiling up from the cradle with eyes blue and bright

Instead we discover not Jesus meek and mild, but a rebel, a maverick this is Christ Child.

God as a boy, born with dark hair, skin that was brown, whose hands would do miracles, who would wear thorns as a crown.

God as a boy, born as a Jew, born in a stable to save me and you

I wonder if you imagine Jesus staring up from his cot, and Mary and Joseph staring down at their tot.

Mary the virgin, all passive and pure looking like she's just done her makeup not given birth on the floor.

And Joseph, oh Joseph, so silent and faithful, who took Mary's hand despite the shame that headed his way for wedding a woman already prenatal, convinced by an angel who told him to stay, said the baby was God's that it would all be Okay.

I wonder if you imagine a dear little donkey, with Mary its load, plodding to Bethlehem along dusty road.

They discover there was no room at the inn so the couple in danger, make do in the stable: the baby comes quickly and is put in the manger.

I wonder if your shepherds are clean faced and per-fect, with tea towel head-dresses red and white checked,
they abandon their flocks heading off in the in the night and make haste into Bethlehem to gawp at the sight.

I wonder if for you the wise men or kings come from afar travelling on camels to worship having spotted a star.

They bring with them gifts not bought from list, but chosen to show that this birth couldn't be missed.

A birth unlike any other ever known throughout time, Gold frankincense myrrh to mark him divine.

I wonder if you were expecting a story so simple: angels with dimples and pitch perfect songs from the hymnals

I wonder if you hear this story and think nothing more, think its just a nice story, that its part of the score -

"We're simply keeping tradition alive as something to do before we drink wine and eat mince pies."

I wonder if you dare to think any further about Jesus the Christ, God made man
Jesus redeemer, Jesus Messiah, Jesus the one who was part of the plan,
to save this land and all of its people who were walking in darkness with no way to see, the
light of the world and the hope that he be.

I wonder if you dare forget expectation and look a bit harder, for another explanation
beyond the bright lights of the windows and shops, to see God at work beyond the frills
and the props
beyond the loud music that tells us to smile and instead pause and listen a while
to see God at work rebellious and real, God as a baby an unexpected reveal.

I wonder if you dare look at the darkness and mess, both now and back then,
all around us the world suffers over and over again.
people fleeing homeland for places of safety, or queuing at food banks to eat something
tasty.

The news is depressing, full of anxiety and fear, leaving us feeling that shadows are near.
Jesus doesn't come as a fairy godmother to remove pain and distress, but instead as a
brother, bringing hope IN the mess.

Nothing in this story happens as expected;

God comes not as a King, not in the way that we'd think, or warrior hero to kick up a stink.
but as a weak feeble human, who can't even speak yet let alone save the world from sin
and regret.

He comes not to a palace, or wearing a cape but is born in the backstreets, in a town out
of shape
and is wrapped in old rags and laid down in the straw, sung to by angels who rejoice at
what they foresaw
His mother, a teenager whose pure heart God had seen, sat quietly and pondered all the
things that had been.

God's arrival incarnate, his birth as a man, is not headline news, revealed on Instagram
but instead heavenly host under cover of night, seek out smelly shepherds who worked as
hard as they might.

The shepherds are first to hear the good news; Messiah is here, to save and light up the
darkness we fear.

The Magi come next, they are migrants and foreign, they followed a star which doesn't
happen often
Their wisdom and knowledge tell them this star is a sign a king has been born, and this
King is divine:
The messiah has come to be king of the Jews and king for us all; that's the really good
news.

And what of this baby, this Messiah whose birth brings light to the darkness and hope to
the earth?

Where is the light and how does it shine, whose is the hope and how can it be mine?

This light doesn't come through Insta or Twitter or handfuls of shopping all covered in glitter.

The light doesn't come with every pound that we spend or every like clicked on a new trend.

Stuff that we hope will destroy all the fear. No this is light that lasts through the new year.

This hope cannot be bought and delivered by post, instead it comes to us all when we need it most.

The light is the word in flesh, who came to earth to redeem who had a mother, and brothers, and friends it would seem.

Who enjoyed a party, who was completely a man, who has been present since the world began.

The hope is this God incarnate and real, who came not to judge but to love and to heal.

Hope was born in a stable and died on a cross, he taught many lessons, experienced tiredness and loss.

He said love each other and not to fight, to consider our neighbour and love with all our might.

His name it is Jesus, we might call him Immanuel, It means God is with us, he has come here to dwell,
with us and in us, amongst all the mess, he comes to bring hope among the distress.

His name it is Jesus, I know him well, I have chosen to love him and in him to dwell.
To let his light shine, in the cracks of my heart, to shine in the shadows and all my dark parts.

Jesus was born for all not just me, who wears funny clothes and lives in the Rectory,
but he came down from heaven to call you by name, to call you to follow and take off your shame.

The good news is there's a chance to say yes to the light, to say yes to the hope, to say yes here tonight.

This is your chance to say yes I want more, I want to know him even though I'm unsure.
You are his, he loves you, doesn't matter what you've done He loves you the Messiah, this Jesus, the baby God's Son.

Perhaps tonight you will see that this is not just a story, that this is the truth, this is God's glory.

I wonder what you were expecting? Carols and mirth? Instead you have discovered our dear saviour's birth.

Not as expected but better by far: a baby whose birth was announced by a star,
Not as expected God who stepped in, stepped down from heaven and took on our skin.

God who stepped in to the darkness and dirt
God who brings freedom, and healing from hurt.

God who created all of the earth, and yet knows your name and what you are worth.
Knows you are perfectly crafted within, knows you and loves you and wants to be let in.

Let into your life to bring complete freedom, to bring light and hope, goodness knows we
all need some.

But the choice it is yours: walk away and forget it tonight
or ponder it all and say yes to his invite.