

Benefice Eucharist, 10am. South Luffenham.

31st December 2017

The laughter of an unexpected family Christmas has left me with no voice. No voice but still an unquenchable hunger for the mystery of The Incarnation which the season of Christmas dumps on our doorsteps.

Now theologians tell us that a mystery remains a mystery however much it is explained. Like love, or the sunrise, or the Red Kites enjoying the winter thermals. That Midnight passage from St. John's Gospel – 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' – circles around our hearts and minds asking to be explored. There are parts of it which we can understand – the culture, the philosophy, the politics – but then we can get no further. It is a mystery and we can accept it by faith: faith in the unseen, the unknown. It is just the same as we approach this sacrament of Holy Communion: we can only draw close and allow God to act, just as the shepherds drew close to God's action in the stable. There are times in life when all we can do is remain silent.

Silence is not easy for the preacher but I will obey, and leave you with the words of a 3rd century saint and Patriarch of Alexandria, Athanasius. He was born in controversial times in the matter of faith as the early church struggled like us to understand the nature of the baby in the stable. Athanasius was exiled from his see 5 times over issues of orthodoxy but finally he was recognized as the Father of Orthodoxy.

In his greatest book, he leaves us with this lovely illustration of The Incarnation: "What then was God to do? What else could be possibly do, being God, but renew His Image in mankind, so that through it men might once more come to know of the very Image Himself, our Saviour Jesus Christ?"

...You know what happens when a portrait that has been painted on a panel becomes obliterated through external stains. The artist does not throw away the panel, but the subject of the portrait has to come and sit for it again, and the likeness is re-drawn on the same material.

Even so was it with the All-holy Son of God. He, the Image of the Father came and dwelt in our midst, in order that he might renew mankind made after Himself, and seek out His lost sheep, even as He says in the Gospel: "I came to seek and to save that which was lost". (The Incarnation 13,14.)

To God be the glory, Amen.