

St Peter's, Ealing  
Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> December 2015  
Christmas Eve

## God of God, Light of Light.

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Recently, as part of the St Paul's Cathedral Adult Education programme, Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury and now Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, was speaking on the subject of the spirituality of Christmas. He began by identifying three types of Christmas carol:

1. The 'Ahhh...pretty little baby' type carol
2. The 'Isn't it cold, shouldn't we have a nice time' type carol
3. The 'disturbing and incomprehensible' or as I rather call them the 'dark and dangerous' carols.

As we gather in the darkness of night, the entrance to the dawn and the start of the new beginning it is the third type of carol I would like to begin my sermon with this evening.

Look if you will at the second verse of carol 13 "O come all ye faithful", the carol we opened our service with this evening.

God of God  
Light of light  
Lo! He abhors not the Virgin's womb;  
Very God,  
Begotten not created.

This heavily worked 4<sup>th</sup> century text struggles to make sense of the impossible in this birth story. This is no ordinary birth, no 'ah pretty baby' moment. Here the writer struggles with what the story of the Christ child means. How to express this great cosmic reality of God born in human flesh.

The words attempt to answer a key question to the understanding of the centre of the Christmas story. God, the King of Angels offers a life boiling over with the effects of the divine presence – God from God – that divinity flowing out into humanity, flowing from the cosmic heart into the world of creation. And if that isn't enough this overflowing divinity brought to us in human flesh is given powerful ancient titles –

Light from light – the overflowing-ness and the overabundance of God in creation; through actions and energy flowing from God into the midst of all people, of all creation.

Here we are given a God who holds nothing back, who flows out to all people – the God with no beginning who gives all – begotten not created. In this verse then we have an image of the nativity which understands in the birth of this child is the beginning of God being like something we have never been able to imagine before. For as the birth happens God doesn't pick apart the fabric of creation but comes in a way that engages with creation and God makes the difference in this story by living as human.

In this then God habitually works by filling out the world from within, from being an integral part of it. Here the divine comes to us in flesh and blood, warm and inviting and in so doing God respects the world, working in it and with it rather than overpowering it and subduing it. From another carol we get the powerful phrase 'Born to raise the sons of earth'. In this God redefines the capacity of humanity.

And all this is only the beginnings of the glories to come. In this baby, in this fragile human birth God redefines the capacity of humanity to change and grow – yet God also entrusts himself to unreliable people – you and me. In this is the beginning of the true story of love, one of trust and forgiveness and healing and wholeness. One that defies adversity and proves to be stronger than death.

The depth of this love story is expressed in the humanity of Christ, this vast outpouring of God into the world that is exposed in this child to death and pain and failure. So, what is it we celebrate at Christmas? What is it that makes a celebration with a point?

God is with us in an intimate and profound way that fills creation and renews humanity with the potential of angels, the humility of shepherds and wisdom of Magi. We through God's incarnation and vulnerability now know a love so deep that history itself is changed for ever.

Now we know God does not need to be persuaded by sacrifices to be on our side. God does not need to be lured from heaven because now we know, in this child, God cannot help himself from giving himself to us. God is already with us, here and now – that is the Christmas story.