

## **Worcester Cathedral Christmas Day**

10.30 Sung Eucharist

*Hebrews 1.1-4, John 1.1-14*

I've lost track of how many times I've rewritten this sermon – it has felt really difficult this year to find something new to say on this glorious day where everybody knows the message of love the peace and the joy of the Christ child. It wasn't helped by the fact that earlier this week I wasn't very well on the very day that I had set aside to start writing my sermon. Like all the best laid plans this was turned upside down by my illness, and so I've been trying to think of what I am going to say on this most important day.

I turned to my phone and googled 'Christmas morning sermon' – for that is how desperate I was. What I got back were a selection of past sermons from famous places, but also in the list was the search-engine-suggested question, 'what should I preach on Christmas Day?' Too good to be true I thought, and so clicked on it to discover an AI generated response. Here goes:

*Tell them about Jesus' birth and death. Tell about His birth and His resurrection. Tell them about Christ's holiness and their sinfulness. Tell them about the glorious salvation that can be theirs in Christ.*

Essentially, tell them the story of Jesus. Well to the Bible readings for today I turned and amid all the rich verses of possible Christmas texts, the words which keep on coming back to me again and again are probably the least festive of all our possibilities: from the letter to the Hebrews a verse which is more about the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord rather than his birth but here goes.

*When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

Words which we heard a short while ago and words which always make me smile. Jesus has made purification for sins - a pretty massive, awesome, and life-changing gift... and then he sits down. There is something so satisfying about the whole work of Christ's redemption, the salvation of our souls, being followed by a nice sitting down.

I sound flippant but I don't want to sound irreverent, and I think today, on this Christmas morning we can all spiritually, if not physically, sit down. For some of us the physical sitting down will be after cooking and washing up, for others it will be after a shift at hospital or hospice, but at some point all of us, the work completed, we will, we must, all sit down. What we might not realise, though perhaps we should glimpse, is that we sit down, like our Lord Jesus Christ, at the right hand of the Majesty on high. That's a pretty impressive seat to take.

Christmas, the celebration of Jesus' birth, is the celebration of the Word made flesh, God taking our human form so that as he embraces our humanity so we may be taken up into his divinity. We sit down (and hear those words again) at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews removes the cloud which prevents us from seeing the truth and tells us how it is. The author presents to us the person of Jesus Christ. 'He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being'.

The exact imprint of God's very being is not only a descriptive phrase but a technical one in many ways, for the word used is *character* and character is a word with a printing background, a word which for us implies both the individual letter from which a copy is made, and also the meaning, the essence of a person. In Jesus Christ, the epistle to the Hebrews tells us, we see the exact impression, the character, the very essence, the full stamp of God. In him we not only see God's glory reflected but we see the exact imprint of God's very being.

The birth of Jesus is a new and clear and bold way in which God speaks to us. Long ago God spoke in many and various ways through prophets and preachers, but now God speaks to us, God comes to us, through his Son, the baby lying in a manger – the reflection of God's glory, the exact imprint of God's very being.

The letter to the Hebrews is one of my favourites because as well as presenting the person of Jesus to us as the image of God, the exact imprint of God's very being, the author sets out Christ's work of sacrifice and salvation and does so, at every turn, in every verse, with every means, in a way which emboldens us to be sharers of Christ's life and power. Again and again, the letter to the Hebrews encourages us with courage and trust, to boldly approach God with confidence. To receive him, to believe in his name.

John, the evangelist, develops this and takes us further. Not only are we drawn into Christ's presence, not only do we boldly approach Christ's glory, but we are assured

that Christ gives us power to become children of God – born not of blood or of the will of the flesh or the will of man, but of God.

So today when the presents are unwrapped, the food eaten, the washing up done, or when work is over and the time comes when you can sit down, it is not too much to know that you sit down in the company of Christ, the one who is the exact imprint of God's very being. It is not too much to say that your company is the same as that holy stable, that you are with the angels and archangels gathered there. It is not too much to say that you sit in the presence of the holy child. And if you are in the presence of the Christ then it is not too much to say that you are also sat on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Christmas is so bold with God's power that it can be forgotten that as Christ comes down in human form, so our humanity is taken up and wrapped in God's Majesty on high. This wonderful exchange, this divine moment, this eternal second, all because we are invited, by the Word made flesh, to sit down, be at peace and wonder at such grace and truth.

And now I am going to sit down, oh no... it's the Creed! Please stand!

Stephen Edwards  
*Dean of Worcester*