

Isaiah 57.7 - 10; Hebrews 1.1 - 4 (5 - 12); John 1.1 - 14

11 pm Midnight Mass: Christmas, 24th/25th December 2011

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory ...” John 1.14

Often, in this secular world, we hear a call from Christians to rediscover the real meaning of Christmas

And this sometimes takes the form of directing people to the story of Christ’s birth which we hear in Luke’s Gospel

And - don’t get me wrong - this is not a bad way to introduce folk to the Christmas Story, but it doesn’t go all the way

For what we need to get to the heart of the Christmas message are the readings we have heard tonight, which are required by the Church to be used at some point today

However, it must be said that they are not the easiest of readings: they are, as the writer of Hebrews says elsewhere, the solid food, after the milk of the Lukan version

And it took me a long time to realise the importance of these readings, how they are central to our faith and how they do express the true meaning of what we celebrate at Christmas

They start at the beginning - with creation - and we are told how God created the world through Christ (John & Hebrews)

Without wishing to digress about the pre-existent Word, the point is that Christ is God - not just some bloke, HE IS GOD!

So Christ is established as existing throughout human history, sustaining all things and inspiring the prophets (Hebrews)

Which prophets told people of God’s plan for His creation - that the Messiah would come to redeem the world

Of which, John the Baptist - as mentioned in John - was the last, encouraging the world to repent and believe the Gospel

That is, to believe in Christ, who had come into the world that He made, but was to be rejected by that same world

As John goes on to say: Christ, our God and Creator, not only became like one of us, His creatures - that is a marvel in itself - but also lived among us, he actually lived as one of us, and had a life just like ours ...

... except that He was rejected, and suffered the death of a criminal on the cross - but, as we know, this was not the end

For He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high

Which he did, so that we might have forgiveness of our sins (Hebrews) and become Children of God (John)

For, as John says, once we have received Christ and believed in Him, then we shall become His children: for, as Christ shared in our humanity, so we have a share in His divinity

All this is the true meaning of Christmas, all this is what we celebrate at this feast - but, of course, there’s more ...

For being a Child of God brings a responsibility that we are reminded of at Christmas - so beautifully expressed by Isaiah

Who tells us that the real meaning of Christmas is that we must be messengers, who must announce the good news of salvation and, above all, peace - to all mankind

Amen.