

Happy New Year Everybody!

I hope your Christmas was safe and that you were in some way able to be in touch with people, let them know how you were and find out how they were. Our need to be in touch with people is fundamental to being human. In spite of all the restrictions and changes, overall as a church we had a good Christmas. The Follow the Star and Evening HCs were well attended, all things considered, and people were excited to be there. And it was especially exciting to share carols at 10am outside with lots of people, some of whom we are just getting to know. And for a moment, songs of praise were the loudest thing you could hear in Southbourne. Imagine that.

Luke 2:15-21

It was praise that alerted the shepherds that something was God was doing something new in the world, starting in a little town. The shepherd's reported, after they had seen the infant Jesus, all that they had heard about this child. Their news was greeted with great joy and celebration among those they told. They were amazed and so were the people around them, the long awaited promises of God were being fulfilled and they were witnesses to these things. But we also read, 'But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart,' v19.

Two things come alive for me from the passage in Luke.

Sharing Joy with others. The shepherds did not keep the news to themselves. They investigated together and shared together the news that God's messiah had come into the world. They had not suspected how it might have happened but the surprise of the heavenly choir did not prevent them. The joy of the gospel is that we are not alone and the God himself, in spite of what we can be like, has come to us. He wants us to know we are not alone and to not be afraid. We can communicate that in hundreds of ways, but the important thing is that we do.

The second thing is that Mary pondered these things in her heart. English doesn't quite do justice to Luke's understanding. The 'things', (*rhema*) are matters declared by God, (see Peter's speech in Acts 10). They are not just ideas, but promises made to his people and affected by God. The second translation ponder sounds a bit vague. The Greek Luke uses is 'together-casting', or *parleying* them, in which differing ideas come together in peace to find the truth. I am reminded of Isaiah 1:18, come let us reason together..... Mary begins to allow the promises of God to shape her thinking about what God is doing and what Jesus, the messiah, might be like. We can all spend time putting what we think in the light of God's truth.

This isn't an instant process, we may change direction when we believe, but somehow character takes longer. (At least mine has!) It is a spiritual work, the renewal of the mind, Rom 12:2, is also the transforming work of the Spirit. And it cannot be compared to a quick fix new year resolution. But if we allow ourselves time to think upon his promises, we fall into step with Jesus more readily and more ably.

As we approach a hopefully more promising year, how are the promises of God going to guide us? How will we allow the benefits of Christ's passion to shape how we see ourselves, our sense of belonging, our future, our identity? Are we grubby shepherds too far from hope, or has hope come to us in Jesus in ways that change us and the way we live amongst our community for joy?

Happy New Year

Love and Prayers

Matt