**Quarry Christmas Eve 2024**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. *(The candle is lit.)*
Those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them has the light shined.

     For a child has been born to us;
     a Son given to us.

   Authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named:
     Wonderful Counsellor;      Mighty God;      Everlasting Father;     Prince of Peace**.**

**CAROL: It came upon**

**Prayer**

God of light and love

Shine upon us this Christmas Eve and in the year ahead. Guide us out of darkness and into your joyous light. May our lives reflect your glorious love that others may see the Christmas spirit in us each and every day. May we be people of peace and goodwill to all.

Come and bring your peace and goodwill and blessings to our worship that we may truly celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Light of the World.

Reading

**Luke 2:1-20: Storyteller Bible**

**Giving of gifts: Convenor’s Charity**

**Saving Santa**

By Revd Alex Mabbs

Nicholas stared out of the window at the night sky, unable to sleep. “How did it come to this?” he wondered. It had started out so well – being nice to children, giving them little gifts, bringing a bit of magic and joy into their little lives. The big mistake was teaming up with that dastardly deer, Rudi “The Nose”. If only he hadn’t listened to Dasher and Dancer, he thought, but he couldn’t really blame them. Like him, they weren’t getting any younger and it seemed like children demanded more each year. It was a struggle to get everything done, and there was little joy in the work. So when Dasher and Dancer mentioned this reindeer they had met at a special club they belonged to, Nicholas agreed to meet him and hear his ideas.

Rudi made it sound so easy. He would provide a bigger sleigh and a couple of extra reindeer to help pull it. Greater speed and greater capacity would get the job done with less effort. When, next Christmas, Rudi suggested an even larger sleigh, Nicholas didn’t need convincing.

The next winter, elves started knocking on the workshop door, looking for casual work. They came just at the right time, when Nicholas was wondering how he would ever source and wrap the huge number of presents the children were asking for, let alone load them onto the sleigh in a sensible order. The elves were a god-send, or perhaps, a little voice whispered within him, a deer-send.

Before long, Nicholas’s latest sleigh was so big that he had to employ nine reindeer to pull it. He also had fifteen elves on permanent staff throughout the year. Not only did he have to pay their wages, but he had paid for a new cabin to be built for them to live in. Well, he hadn’t paid for it yet. Like always, Rudi’s terms had been very attractive, if rather vague, and Nicholas was sure that his expanding enterprise would soon start turning a profit.

At least, he had been sure. But each year, the costs seemed to increase. It wasn’t just the elves and their cabins, the extra reindeer and the upgrades to the sleigh and the vast industrial facility they still quaintly called the workshop. Children who, long ago, had been happy with nuts, oranges and sweets in a stocking, now wanted electronics and all sorts of expensive gadgets, leaving huge plastic sacks out for Nicholas to fill. When Rudi started to mention getting some return on his investment and started to mention numbers, Nicholas was stunned. He hadn’t noticed how much he’d let things get out of hand. Rudi started getting a lot less pleasant. The elves started complaining about their pay and conditions. Even the reindeer became surly and Nicholas was sure they were calling him names. It seemed that Rudi had some kind of hold on them all. Nicholas couldn’t help feeling it had something to do with that strange, almost-glowing, red nose of his.

It was the night before Christmas Eve and Nicholas couldn’t sleep, he was so worried. As he lay in his bed, looking through the window at the stars, one star seemed to shine more brightly, as if it were calling to him. He tip-toed past the snoring elves and through the workshop, piled high with toys and games, computers and TVs, all destined for children’s bedrooms in a few hours’ time. Past the sleeping reindeer, and he was outside in the silence of the night.

There was the star! Nicholas walked along the path made in the snow by the star’s light until he came to a cave. In the cave were three men kneeling in front of a feeding trough. In the trough was a baby, and the light shining from the baby was brighter than any star (or any reindeer’s nose, for that matter).

Nicholas watched as the three men offered presents to the baby. Nicholas crept in and knelt beside them. “I’m sorry,” he whispered. “I’m so sorry. I had forgotten who it was all for. Every gift was for you. Every child was you. And I’ve forgotten that. I’ve forgotten what love looks like and what love looks for.” As Nicholas knelt in front of the baby, his tears rolling down onto the ground, he felt a hand touch his shoulder. It was the child’s mother. She gently helped him up, wiped his face, kissed his cheek and turned him towards the workshop. “Thank you,” he said. Nicholas knew what he had to do.

Around the back of the workshop, Nicholas quietly opened the door of a tumble-down shed. With all his strength he pulled out the old sleigh. Once on the snow, the going was easier and by the time the sun started to rise, Nicholas was well on his way, away from Rudi, away from the elves, away from the gleaming piles of stuff, away to a new life with nothing but an empty sleigh and a heart so full he thought it might burst.

\*     \*     \*

The presents still arrive in children’s bedrooms every Christmas Eve, just like before. Children still write their lists and dream of a jolly man in red coming down the chimney with a sack full of toys. Whether the toys are actually delivered by a jolly man in red or by an over-worked elf on a tight schedule, no one is awake to see.

Meanwhile, sometimes, and not only at Christmas, a young woman at her wits’ end to see any option other than the streets will awaken to find a small bag of money next to her pillow. Sometimes, sailors who have survived a terrible storm will tell tall tales about seeing a man through the spray, standing on the prow, pointing at a star that guided the ship to safety. Sometimes, a prisoner, wrongly accused, will be awoken and told that her fine has been paid and she can go free. Sometimes, a child who hasn’t eaten for days will discover an orange and some nuts in their shoes in the morning.

And there’s a shabby-looking mini-cab driver in Basingstoke with a slight Norwegian accent, who can’t be found as often as he can, whose old car doesn’t so much rattle as jingle, who doesn’t say much, but when he looks at you it’s as if he’s looking at royalty. Many of his customers don’t even notice, but some who do find their heart swelling and something thawing inside them and a few wonder if it might be possible in these days to be a saint.

**Emmaus: The Servant’s Story**

There was something going on that day. The master and his friend had come in with this man they’d met on the road and I was serving them supper. Just the usual stuff – some bread, some wine, some cheese, some olives. I caught snatches of conversation and it was clear that something was going on, but I felt as if I was the only one in the room who didn’t get it. Ah well – I’m just the servant, the guy in the background, the guy with a job to do. Food to fetch. Pots to clear. Check everyone’s OK. Check everyone…

As I turned away, out of the corner of my eye, something changed in the appearance of the stranger and it looked like… well it looked like he was made of air, like a breath of wind would carry him away, like he could just vanish at any moment, but then when I looked again, he seemed more solid, somehow more physically present than anything else I’d ever seen.

He took the bread and said a prayer of thanks, as if this was his house, his table. But I thought, I know you’re a servant – it takes one to know one – and I noticed deep wounds in his hands and scars across his forehead and I thought, this man has suffered. Perhaps he’s a runaway slave, but there was nothing of the fugitive about him. He seemed more light and free and in possession of himself than anyone I’ve met. I thought, actually, I’m the one here who’s getting this. They’ve invited fire to supper, a whirlwind to the table, and they’re just asking stupid questions about scripture. But I guess it takes a servant to recognise a servant.

It was then that he looked up at me and I thought, those eyes have seen more pain and suffering than eyes should see. There were all the depths of ages in those eyes. It was as if they’d seen stars and planets born, but as he held my gaze it reminded me of when I’d looked into the eyes of my kids when they were babies, like his eyes were just starting to see the world for the first time, full of wonder and, as he held my gaze, full of trust.

Then he spoke to me and it was like the sound of rushing water, of roaring flames, of a storm wind ripping out trees and of sheer silence, all at the same time. But the words he said were, “Come. Join us.”

And right there I knew I had a choice that would change my life. I could say, “Thank you, Sir, but I’ve got work to do,” and pick up the empty pots, go back to the kitchen, keep my job and stay safe. Or I could pull up a chair and sit next to the hurricane, next to the fire, next to freedom itself and there’d be no going back.

I sat down at the table, with my heart in my mouth. He said, “This is the bread of life,” and gave me a piece. I knew it was the bread of Ben, because I’d bought it from him earlier, but when I tasted it, it was just amazing. You could serve this bread to angels and you’d blow them away. There is definitely something going on here, I thought. All my life I’ve given out, given out, served. Yet when this man served me, with only what I’d brought him, I felt filled up. I felt like I was caught up in a whirlwind, lifted up, soaring free. I was on fire. He was empty – there was nothing to him and yet all of creation, all of life was within him. He had everything. He had the world in his hands.

When they took the bread, the penny dropped for the others too and recognition lit up in their eyes. Then, all of a sudden, they started looking around, as if they couldn’t see him at all. “It was Jesus!”, said the master. “I knew it! Let’s get back to Jerusalem and tell the others.” But I could see Jesus was still there, wearing a smile as wide as the sky and holding his hands out to me. “Let’s go,” he said. “I know another way. Come with me.”

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**Carol O Little Town of Bethlehem**

Prayer:

We thank you, Lord, for the joys of this day:
for the joy of giving and receiving;
the joy, perhaps, of reunion with family and friends;
the joys of feasting and of laughter.
We thank you, Lord, for the singing of carols and Christmas hymns;
for the reading of loved and familiar words of scripture;
the joys of worship and holy celebration.

Thanks be to you, Lord, for the challenge of Christmas;
for your coming in poverty
which challenges the affluence we take for granted;
for your self-giving
which puts in perspective all our charity.

Lord, give us pause in all our celebrations to contemplate the mystery of your holy incarnation.

Father, we pray for those who at Christmas are made more aware of their own loneliness:
for those who get no presents, or very few;
for those who have no families, or whose families are far away or whose families they are unable to meet up with this year because of the restrictions.
We pray for those to whom Christmas brings sharp memories of happier ones.
Christ be with them and grant them consolation.

Lord of all good, your Word is in the world. Teach us to hear him, and so to celebrate his birth that we may be born again to a life of righteousness.

Today, in all the demands,
we pray for those who are facing a Christmas
without someone they love.
God of goodness,
hear us and be with us.

Today, in all the delights,
we pray for those who are facing a Christmas alone.
God of goodness…
hear us and be with us.

Today, in all the celebrations, we pray for those who are facing conflicts.
God of goodness…
hear us and be with us.

Today, in all the time at tables, we pray for those who are hungry.
God of goodness… hear us and be with us.

God, you remind us that the truest gift is the gift of love.
Today, giving and unwrapping gifts, with joy and maybe even disappointment, let us love one another, because love comes from you. And love is the best thing worth celebrating.
Amen.

**Amen.**

**Lighting of Candles: receive the light of Christ.**

**Silent Night**

LET’S PAUSE IN SILENCE FOR A MOMENT AND TAKE ALL THIS IN.

The Word Became Flesh

**1**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2**He was with God in the beginning. **3**Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4**In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+1&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26050a)] it.

**6**There was a man sent from God whose name was John. **7**He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. **8**He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

**9**The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. **10**He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. **11**He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. **12**Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— **13**children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

**14**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Give thanks for this Good News.

Pray God’s blessing on all our celebrations today.

Peace, Joy and Love.

Pray for those who will be working today. Give thanks for their service.

Pray for those who will be helping others today. Remember those volunteers at Friends at Christmas, Drop-ins and night shelters around the country.

Pray for those who keep us safe and secure, armed forces, emergency services, our health and social services.

Pray for our country, for God’s blessing on us and protection on us in the year ahead.

Help us cherish the light of love Christ brought to us and follow his way of love for neighbour, love for enemies and love for God.

His light shines in the darkness and the darkness has overcome. In him was life and that life was the light for all mankind.

Glory to God in the highest and peace and goodwill to all people.

Amen.

**Blessing**

A child has been born to us who is the Prince of Peace. He shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

Joy to the World the Saviour comes.

Go now on the journey to Christmas:

bring glory to God in the highest

and peace among all on the earth.

And the blessing…..

WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS.