

Life on the Edge ...

... Moving towards a new Centre

A reflection given on Christmas Eve, 24th December 2020, by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in the pre-recorded service of Lessons and Carols.

As one of the poets puts it, "Christmas sets the centre on the edge."

The Christmas story tells how God, who is the source of everything, goes out to the edge. The setting is in a remote province on the edge of the Roman Empire, on the edge of a poor country town, in an outbuilding round the back of the Inn. The birth of Jesus is noticed only by marginal figures: rough, no-good shepherds out on the hills; visiting foreign stargazers from far off lands. This is a story full of displacement where nothing is where you would expect it to be. It's all a bit 'inside-out'.

And it's a story that is more relevant today than ever. In 2020, we felt in so many ways, the centre has been pushed out to the edge. For many of us, the centre of our lives is filled by family or work, and we've had to keep our distance from both; keep away from social events; from shops; from clubs and churches; stay at home; keep to the margins; live on the edge; and make Zoom a substitute for face-to-face - the centre has been pushed out to the edge.

And Christmas reminds us that this is exactly where God comes to meet us - on the edge, in lives that have been disrupted and turned inside out, where what was taken for granted has suddenly been taken away.

So however, you are planning to celebrate Christmas this year, whether you're with others or by yourself, whether it feels familiar or strange, try to receive that displacement, that 'inside-out'-ness as a gift; not just an inconvenience, but an opportunity when we find ourselves on the margins of what is normal, to discover the God who in Jesus comes out to the edge to meet us, not to make us comfortable, but to make us alive.

So in this Christmas, spent out on the edge, may you find a new centre. And may you have a very happy and peaceful Christmas.

Reading Text

'Christmas on the Edge'

Malcolm Guite (2011)

Christmas sets the centre on the edge;
The edge of town, the outhouse of the inn,
The fringe of empire, far from privilege
And power, on the edge and outer spin
Of turning worlds, a margin of small stars
That edge a galaxy itself light years
From some unguessed at cosmic origin.
Christmas sets the centre at the edge.

And from this day our world is re-aligned
A tiny seed unfolding in the womb
Becomes the source from which we all unfold
And flower into being. We are healed,
The end begins, the tomb becomes a womb,
For now in him all things are re-aligned.