

Immanuel, 24<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Luke 2; 1-14

I find it difficult to believe that Christmas is a time for only looking back, to that which was as if it had no connection with what is and what is to come, for if that were the case it would be a simple exercise of memory, with no sense of challenge to us now. And that is not the case.

The reading begins with a decree from the Roman Emperor which has effect on all the empire, even in far away Judea. And forces Joseph and Mary to travel. With the help of Google, we know that this is a journey of about 100 miles (70 if you fly from A to Z). It would take about 36 hours to walk, not taking account detours, slow pace for a 9-month pregnant Mary travelling on the hard back of a donkey. That was bad enough then, because all places to stay were occupied.

Today this is even a more complicated journey, because Nazareth is part of Israel and Bethlem is part of the West Bank, there would be reduced access from one area to the other, and often long waiting, and very often not being allowed to cross the barriers. Today the shepherds or the wise men would most probably not be allowed in either.

As then, there are many who find nowhere to stay, where doors are still closed, and people are continue not to be made to feel welcome.

This is not what the birth of Jesus was or even is, about. He was born to that we were all given the gift of fullness of life, for all people. Where there would no longer be division of Gentile or Jew, where doors would be opened, and people would meet. The shepherds hear the call, and the choir of angels, and go and see, and then go and tell. And hope was renewed that God's gift to creation would be true and make a difference.

This is where we are today, even when that fullness for all is still to be achieved, it is in our hands, our voices, our walking and sharing where we can hope, celebrate and share. Christmas is still very much part of our present, not only of our past, and clearly very much of what is yet to come. Thanks be to God for that. Amen