

Christmas Day 2022

We began our service by praying a blessing on the Crib

Yesterday we told the story of Jesus' birth with this crib, telling the stories of each of the characters who found God with us in the child born of Mary and lying in a manger.

It's the Christmas story that the children of Lynton Primary school have also told here – as they acted and sang about Mary and Joseph finding a place in the stable for Jesus to be born, the angels telling the shepherds about his birth and the wise men following the star – and they all end up gathered together to find God's love come to them in person as Jesus.

We have St Francis of Assisi to thank for giving us these ways to tell the Christmas story.

He wanted to help people experience the power this story holds: that God becomes one of us: "dwelling among us" as today's reading says.

So Francis found a spot outside a village, built a life size manger space and invited local villagers to take the parts of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and wise ones, they brought live animals and right at the heart of the scene was a new born baby.

Everyone else from the village went out on Christmas Eve to see the crib – and what did they see – people just like them, even a baby like we all have been. It was a joyous experience, drawing the villagers into the warmth of God's love – so joyous that the tradition of the crib has spread all over the world.

The crib – the place that shows us how to find God in the world, closer and more familiar than we ever thought.

Jesus comes to be one of us, to show us that we can be like him – a child of God. We can know that the God who makes all things, hold all things in being, is beyond our imagining, loves us beyond our imagining so much that Jesus shows us who he is, as one of us.

So what about us:

I wonder how many of you were once in a nativity play?

Which character were you?

Who have we got here?

If you weren't in a nativity play which character would you like to be?

So now let's look around us:

who is here for the shepherds,

who is here for the wise ones,

who is an angel, a messenger of God,

who is Mary, who is Joseph,

who is a villager or a character there quietly but not named?

All the characters could be here.

There is a place for us all in the story, a place for us all at the crib.

The power in the story though is something more.

Jesus comes as a baby to show us that all babies are children of God; we can see the image of God in every child.

If in every child then in every person – in each other.

The more we recognise God in the baby Jesus as we do today as we gaze on the crib, the more we offer our love and worship to God in person, the more we are invited to see God in the children, and grown ups around us, to offer our love to each other, and receive God's love from each other too.

Whilst St Francis helped his friends to discover that by dressing neighbours up as characters in the crib, we don't need costumes for it to be true that Jesus comes and dwells among us today, just as we are.

If we open our hearts to his love born in us today, then it is us as a group of people that become God's living "Crib".

So the invitation today is to look around you and notice that God comes to you through the people here, the people and creatures you have contact with today and that God comes to them through you – your words, your love your presence.

By opening our hearts to Jesus' love, offered first in the vulnerability of a child in a manger, let's make of our church, our homes and our world,

the great Crib which draws all into the fullness of the love of God today
and always. Amen