

To You is born this day

I have to confess that I have been known to be something of a wrapping paper obsessive. In Christmases past I may have scoured the shops as soon as wrapping paper was available to scout out the best quality, most attractive, and most colour co-ordinated paper. And every present, whether for adults or children would be wrapped in the same beautiful tartan, or foil, or the irritating glittery wrap that was that year's particular theme. And of course, they would be finished off by colour co-ordinated ribbons, bows and other paraphernalia. In all of this, I was the artistic director, coming up with the theme but not actually doing the wrapping!

The one thing that let me down every year was always the gift tags. By the time I'd chosen the paper my creative juices had run out and so, very often, I would buy the slightly cheaper self-adhesive tags, co-ordinated of course, but not particularly high end. And after a thoughtful message had been written on each one, they would probably be hurriedly stuck onto each present and put under the tree. Which was fine, until we had to transport them. And somehow in the transportation process unfailingly at least one or two tags

would fall off, I think one year nearly all of them fell off. And then as you produce the presents from the carefully selected and co-ordinated bag you have the sudden, crushing realisation that you have no idea who the gift or gifts are for! Wracking your brain quickly to try to judge by size, weight, noise or even smell who on earth the gift is for. If you got it right, it was fine, if you got it wrong your sister-in-law might not be impressed with the socks you bought your Dad, or far worse.

Who is this gift for? That is the question of the Christmas story, that is the question of this holy day. During Advent we have been waiting for the gift of God in the birth of the Christ child, Jesus. We have been longing to celebrate this birth and the hope, and joy, and peace that this gift brings. But who is this gift for?

The trouble with us modern people is that in all of our questioning, in all of our investigating, in all of our intelligent and sophisticated pondering we have forgotten to listen to the voice of the angel. “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

Well now, hang on a moment, surely in context the 'you' is the nation of Israel, the faithful. Yes, in the immediate context it is. God's promise to Abraham, reiterated through the prophets, boldly proclaimed by John the Baptist, fulfilled through the obedience of Mary and Joseph is to Israel and it is to Israel that the angels speak. But for the writer to the Hebrews, it is quite clear that the you, now includes us, you and me sitting here this morning.

Really? Isn't the gift made to those who actually believe this stuff? Those religious types who spend their time praying and doing good? Or isn't the gift given to those who have some kind of power, are able to do something with it? Or to those who understand it, grasp it and tell others?

The gospel reminds us that God appears to the less than perfect, the less than powerful. It is to the shepherds, those outcasts on the edge of society that the angelic host proclaim the good news. It is a baby in a manger, born into poverty who will become ruler of the world, not the Emperor Augustus in all of his Imperial might and craving after divinity. Luke very carefully uses exactly the same kind of language and tone that was usually reserved for the Emperor to talk about the birth of Jesus.

To you is born this day ... a Saviour who is the Messiah, the Lord. Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us. Down through the ages, for all time this child will be the light until all manner of things shall be well. The hopes and fears of all the years, are met in him.

So yes, this gift, this message of the angels, this child born this holy day is for you. You. Whether you are single, married, divorced, widowed, gay, confused, filthy rich, comfortable, or dirt poor. The gift is to you if you are a Berwicker, an incomer, or just passing through. The gift is for you if you can sing like Pavarotti or can't sing a note. It's for you if you're 'just browsing,' just woke up, or just got out of prison. The gift is for you if you're more Christian than the Pope or haven't been in church since last Christmas. This gift is for you if you are still in recovery or still addicted. It's a gift if you're on top of the world or grieving, if you're having problems or you're down in the dumps or if you don't like 'organised religion'. This is the gift for seekers and doubters, saints and sinners, regulars, visitors, friends and strangers. This gift is for you even if you don't believe all this mumbo jumbo.

But this gift is also for us, for all peoples the angels sing. We can't keep it to ourselves or exclude others from it. The abundance of God's love and grace cannot be owned by a nation, a race, or even a church. It is for everyone even as it is for you.

To you is born this day a Saviour, the Messiah, the Lord - Jesus. To you, to us. Look down at your feet for just a moment, indulge me it's Christmas! Maybe you've got new Christmas socks, maybe you didn't take any notice of them this morning or never do. Or maybe you like feet a bit too much! The prophet Isaiah tells us that our feet are beautiful, because we have good news! And as we proclaim that good news in carols, in Scripture and in sacrament we are reminded that the good news is for us and all peoples.

The gift being given is only one half of the story of course. How we receive the gift completes it. And so, on this holy day, as we ponder the gift of the Christ child, as we hear again the message of the angels, how does this news relate to you? What might it mean concretely in your life?

Year A
Christmas Day
Isaiah 52:7-10
Hebrews 1:1-4, 5-12
Luke 2:1-14

Only you and only I can answer that question for ourselves. But answer it we must, because the gift has been given, come let us adore him!