



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for the Mass of Christmas Day (25th December) 2025

This morning, our assembly is focused on two pictures. The first, of course, is the Crib: a moment caught in time with the newborn Christ at the centre with the shepherds gathered around it. Yet, of course, in our minds, it is not a static image.

In the world of films, there is a cinematic technique where a scene starts with a single image which appears to be a photograph, but which is, in fact, is the first frame of the footage and after it has been projected for a few seconds, as it were it comes alive and the story of which it is part unfolds. In a similar way, when we look at the Crib, we see not just the moment, but the whole story of the Nativity.

The second picture is a verbal image: what we call Saint John's Prologue, the introduction to his Gospel. It is an extraordinary piece of writing and for those who seek to find evidence of divine inspiration in the words of Holy Writ, this must be a jewel in the search.

Whereas the Crib illustrates the earthly details of the Nativity, Saint John's Prologue unfolds the eternal realities clothed in those historical events: his words reveal the Nativity to have been the Incarnation - the *enfleshment* of God in a human life. Informed by his prose, when we look on the image of the Baby at the centre of the Crib, we see God-made-Man.

If we try to contemplate the idea of the fullness of God's power and Purpose inherent in this small human figure, reliant on the care and protection of Mary and Joseph, surely we must struggle to comprehend the fullness of this truth. To our constrained human understanding, it is a paradox that the Infinite can be manifested in its entirety in such an apparently finite form.

This is what poets of former generations have termed the *Magnum Mysterium* - the Great Mystery. Here, *mystery* should be understood in its stronger sense of the word as a reality hidden from earthly sight and beyond the power of the human mind fully to know or explain.

Yet, through the words of Saint John, we are given sufficient understanding to grasp the implications of the Nativity for ourselves and our lives. This was not just a moment in time, one in a sequence of earthly events, but a salient episode in the unfolding of God's eternal Purpose. The adult the Baby would become would not be just another man offering a critique of society and contributing to the repertoire of ideas, but God speaking the Truth to man.

At the same time, this Jesus would, as we say today, model what it is to be truly human; to be free of the frailties, which corrupt our lives and make us less than we should be, abusing our power and tilting the balance between individual interest and the greater good too greatly in favour of our own advantage.

Emanating from the *Magnum Mysterium* is a light, which shines on all the choices and decisions that confront us: how we use our time and our resources, how we respond to the events which unfold around us, how we treat the people we meet.

The challenge of our Christian discipleship is to live in that light and make of ourselves and our lives, people who would not look out of place in the two pictures we contemplate: people who have heard Christ's call and come to offer Him our devotion, people who have seen the Glory of the only Son of the Father and through His power become children of God