

ADVENT REFLECTION 2020

Week 4: Christmas Present

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Our daughter Annie, who died of natural causes in June 2020, was a scripture scholar. In an article written in December 2018 for Church Army, where she was Lead Training Tutor, she examined several different meanings of the words *Christmas Present*:

“In recent weeks I’ve been reflecting on how Jesus’ coming into the world teaches us about presence, and how Jesus is the presence of the Father, God-with-us.

One of the Hebrew words translated as ‘*presence*’ in the Old Testament is ‘*paniyim*’, which can also be translated as ‘*face*’. I love this, because it reveals something of the nearness of God’s presence and the close, personal encounter we can have with God face-to-face. As Psalm 67:1 tells us, to experience God’s presence is to experience the light in God’s shining face.

‘*Present*’ is one of those wonderfully rich words that can have all sorts of meanings.

When we think of Christmas presents, we think of gifts; Jesus certainly is the self-gift of the Father to the world. But to be present also means to be: here, to be near, to turn up, to exist in this moment, now, to be accessible. Isn’t it wonderful that Jesus’ coming means all these things as well?

When I look at Jesus’ life and ministry, I’m struck by how totally present he was to everyone and in everything. Whether in prayer to the Father, in conversation with the people he encountered, in proclaiming the kingdom, in ministering to people’s needs, in listening to their concerns, in suffering, in dying and in rising, Jesus was fully present in each particular moment.

I wonder if this Christmas we can practise being fully present in this particular moment, to these particular people in this particular place, without thinking of what comes next?

Can we accept this moment as a gift from God, to be lived to the full?”

‘I am the handmaid of the Lord,’ said Mary ‘let what you have said be done to me’. Luke 1:38

SAYING ‘YES’ TO GOD

In this final week of Advent, as we prepare to welcome the Christ child into our midst, we are challenged to reflect on the truth Jesus brings and to consider our response, inspired by Mary’s unconditional ‘Yes’ to God’s plan. May we too say ‘Yes’ to his message and respond to his calling with joyful and willing hearts.

In the peace and stillness of a retreat, or even in just 10 minutes quiet time alone in prayer, we can cast aside the busyness of Christmas preparations and find time to say our ‘Yes’ to God.

In 2004 Annie reported on retreats from her time as a member of the Sheffield University Catholic Chaplaincy, highlighting the value of slowing down to listen attentively to God and also the joy of spending quality time with others.

Holy Island Retreat: Celtic spirituality

“During the retreat, the example of the Celtic Saints taught us the importance of silent meditation and the need to come apart from time to time to truly listen to God. It was a fantastic opportunity to come away from our hectic lives and to spend some time apart with God in the beauty of a wonderfully Holy Island.”

Sisters of Sion Retreat, Harbourne:

I have called you by your name: you are mine!

“So often we hurry through life, rushing from one task to the next, barely pausing to reflect or listen to the voice of the Lord, but in this time of prayer, as we searched in the silence, we put aside all distractions to seek God’s face. Later, we sat by the fire and shared laughter and companionship.

Saturday morning began in prayer, contemplating God’s unconditional love for us and his willingness to reform us when we fail.”

The mystery, which was kept secret for endless ages, is now made clear. Romans 16:25