

Christmas 2 Year B 2021

Amongst the gifts I was given this Christmas was this large carrier bag, full of little gifts - gifts for the bathroom, gifts for the kitchen, things for sharing and things for keeping for myself, things for instant consumption and somethings for long term enjoyment - every one separately wrapped, each with its own greeting. Now, I am one of those infuriating people who like to have a good feel and try to guess what is inside a present, before I ultimately unwrap it, so it did take quite a while, but of course it was delightfully well worth the wait - and the effort.

St Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a bit like that - it begins with a bag full of gifts, openly named - and then you have to carefully unwrap everything, one chapter at a time. Today, we get the list of the gifts, but you will have to wait until July and August for the careful unwrapping, when there will be six consecutive Sundays with readings from the Letter to the Ephesians, for your consideration.

So, let us begin with the gifts, on this second Christmas Sunday.

St Paul tells - *GOD*

has blessed us in Christ

chose us in Christ

destined us for adoption as his children

freely bestowed glorious grace on us

given us redemption - forgiveness

lavished grace on us

made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure

has gathered up all things in (Christ)

given us an inheritance (in Christ),

and all of this 'so that we might live for the praise of his glory', because 'we were marked for the seal of his Holy Spirit'.

Could we ever have dreamed of so many gifts?

And someone said that Christmas was cancelled!

This is *God* at work (not our doing) showering us with blessing upon blessing, in Christ, from 'before the foundation of the world', until its end - 'our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people'.

In Christ, Paul tells us, *God* has revealed the mystery of his will.

This is the Christ who was, and is, and ever will be, the Word - the one who became flesh and lived amongst us, although 'lived' is a pretty poor translation of John's Greek - 'tabernacled' would be

better, but we might not understand that, so how about 'pitched his tent amongst us'?

During the Exodus, that long journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the land which God had promised to give them, God had travelled with his people. They believed that God lived in the Ark of the Covenant, a box containing his commandments, his words, his wisdom. The Ark was housed in a tent made of sheep and goat skins, and was carried wherever the people went. But Moses had had to pitch the tent outside the camp of the Israelites because God was so angry with the people, after they made the golden calf. 'I will not go among you' God says, 'or I would consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people'. So Moses pitched the tent far off from the camp. He called it the tent of meeting, and if you wanted to talk to God or listen to God, you had to leave the security of the camp and venture into the wilderness, and risk God's wrath.

In a reading from the book Ecclesiasticus, an alternative reading set for today, we hear Wisdom (personified) telling the people "I dwelt in the highest heavens, then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and the Creator chose a place for my tent. He said 'Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your

inheritance'." (see Ecc 24.1-12). This is the Wisdom who was 'created . . . at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago' (Prov 8.22), who in Jewish tradition was identified with Torah and in the developing Christian tradition with Jesus.

St John clearly recalls all this when he is writing his prologue, but now God does not live in a box in a tent outside the camp, nor in Wisdom's tent, but in a person called Jesus, who pitches his tent amongst us, each of us in our own exodus, our journey from the slavery of sin to forgiveness, from darkness into light, from fear into hope. And as we make that journey we encounter all those whom Jesus brings along with him, to journey with us. Jeremiah lists them as the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labour - in other words the marginalised, the outcast, the unacceptable, the undeserving - migrants, foreigners, asylum seekers, the unemployed and homeless 'them' not 'us'. 'And their life shall become as a watered garden'. Now, that would be another wonderful Christmas present for God to give us - a watering can - so that those in need can move into a watered garden!

The adult Jesus does not seem to have had a home of his own. he stayed with Peter in Capernaum, with the seven times married

Samaritan woman in Sychar, with Mary and Martha, with the wild animals of the wilderness, he ate with tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees - no permanent place to lay his head. He borrowed someone else's room for his last supper, and his body was laid in a tomb prepared for another man. All that because he chose to pitch his tent amongst us, in the guise of an unexpected, perhaps unwelcome, guest, but also as gracious, generous host.

So many gifts, so many gifts - so that we might live to the praise of his glory.

And of course you don't have to wait until July to unpack all this - you could go home today and read Paul's letter to the Ephesians. What a wonderful way to spend Sunday afternoon.