

Carol Services, 2011.

As we enjoy this wonderful carol service of such beautiful words and music, my mind goes back to November when 100 people from the Diocese went on Pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We had a marvellous time, full of prayer and joy, although some of it was distressing as we met up with people of the village of Beit Jallah who, right now, face losing precious land and homes in the continuing construction, by Israel, of the security/separation wall. I pray for them.

We visited Nazareth, Jerusalem and, of course, Bethlehem. It was very moving. One pilgrim kept a poetic log, or reflection, on the events of the journey; words such as these:

“At the window....Mary’s home...the archangel Gabriel ... kneels awesome ... beautiful ...filled with love’s greeting...spilling pools of brilliant rainbow light across the floor and the power of the most high stoops into the shadows of our life saying.... ‘Come my love’and we walk with Mary to welcome Christ...in Joseph’s home.”

Yes, indeed, in the stable of Bethlehem the power of the Most High stooped into the shadows of our lives. And, at that spot, we too stooped low to kiss the silver cross that marks the place of Christ’s birth.

I hope you will do so before the crib this Christmas. In our churches, we will kneel before our new born Saviour, our hearts full of thoughts and prayers.

Take your time there. See in the images of the crib the great act of God’s loving humility, coming to us in poverty so that we may not be overwhelmed by God’s majesty but drawn to God’s love.

As you see the outstretched arms of the child hear again those words of invitation: ‘Come then, my love, my lovely one, come. For see, the winter is past the rains are over and gone.’ These are indeed the words of the Lord to each one of us. He continues: ‘Show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet and your face is beautiful.’ (Song of Songs 2.10-14)

Here is the invitation of Christmas: that the Lord, in coming to us, wants above all to draw us to himself. He loves us, each of us, in our hidden selves, more than we could ever know. In his sight we are beautiful of face and sweet of voice. We may not think so. But he sees us with fresh, Christmas eyes. He sees deep into the soul given to each one of us by his heavenly Father and beautiful beyond measure.

Let us open our hearts to him, respond to his invitation, allow the life of our soul to breathe with a fresh grace, the grace that comes with forgiveness and repentance, the grace which enables us to rise from our knees with new heart, new hope and new love.

I wish you all a very happy and holy Christmas.
May God bless you all.