

## Homily: Second Sunday of Christmas 2021/2 (Year C)

In some ways beginning a new year is a bit like setting out on a long voyage. We don't quite know how calm or how rough the seas will be; we're not entirely sure who and what we'll encounter on the way. I've never been on a lengthy voyage, but a few times I've made a ferry crossing from England to Spain, spending a couple of nights on the boat. Leaving the harbour at Portsmouth always seemed to me to be beginning a great adventure. Going out into the open waves, spending a whole day at sea without being able to catch sight of land, even seeing a few dolphins alongside the ship: these are all things I enjoy remembering.

The ocean is an impressive place: vast, powerful, somehow mysterious. But what lies within it is even more incredible. When we see pictures from deep beneath the surface we get a glimpse at the incredible variety of life, the shapes, colours and forms that are normally hidden from our eyes. There is a whole universe which cannot be seen by those who only observe the surface, impressive as the surface can be.

Today we're invited to go beneath the surface of the great feast of the Lord's birth. Over the last few days, we've heard stories of the birth of Jesus, of angels and shepherds, of the baby lying in the manger. All of this is wonderful, but it is really only the surface: the real mystery, the real joy, is to be found deeper. For many people, Christmas is nothing but parties, presents and decorative lights; for others, it includes a recognition that it is the birthday of Jesus, and the story of His birth brings them some joy. But for us, for people who try to follow this child all year round, there is a whole universe to be discovered beneath the surface of this story. And in today's Gospel, St John takes us diving beneath the surface.

This text, the Prologue of St John's Gospel, is not easy to grasp. But it's worth the effort. He speaks of Jesus as "the Word of God": a Word which gives life and light, a Word which brings order out of chaos, a Word which has taken flesh, taken our human nature, and lived among us. One simple way into this passage is to replace "the Word" with the name of Jesus: this begins to open up the mystery for us. "In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things came to be; not one thing had its being but through Him... Jesus was the true light that enlightens all men, and He was coming into the world... Jesus was made flesh; He lived among us and we saw His glory."

These are some of the things St John tells us about Jesus, the incarnate Word of God. And right in the middle of this text, there is an invitation and a challenge: "Jesus came to His own domain, and His own people did not accept Him. But to all who did accept Him, He gave power to become children of God." This is the challenge: to accept Jesus – all His sayings, all His actions, all His promptings – as the Word of God speaking in my life. This is not easy, but the rewards are wonderful. For, if we accept Him, as John says, He gives us power to become children of God. By becoming human, Jesus, the Son of God, has made Himself our brother; so we are His brothers and sisters, and therefore God becomes our Father in a new way. We begin to share with God that relationship which Jesus has with the

Father: we become, like Him, 'sons', children of God. And to be a child of God in this way means to be eternal. It means to belong to the family whose home is heaven. This is a beautiful and wonderful thing, and it is by accepting Jesus that we receive this gift.

"The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us." Only when we see who this Word is can we begin to go beneath the surface of the cosy Christmas images. In fact, for the rest of the year, through hearing the words and actions of Jesus in the Gospel, and through our own prayer and reflection on His presence in our lives, we will come to know Him a little better. We will go a little further beneath the surface, into the beautiful world of Christian faith. And in a certain sense, the Word can take flesh in my life too: by listening to Jesus, by following Him more closely, by letting Him work within me so that I become more like Him, I will allow His Word to take flesh in me, to be lived out in me. At least, that's my hope, that's my prayer for this new year. That's my hope and my prayer for all of us, and for our parish community: that the Word of God will be made flesh in us, will find expression in our lives, so that we become an ever clearer sign of the presence of Christ in our community. Today we're invited to go deep beneath the surface of the Christmas story, to accept Jesus, to allow Him and His Word to shape our lives, so that He may be instruments of His presence in our world today.

Fr Andrew

