

Where's that Joy?

Luke 2:8-11 (NIV)

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

While both the righteous and the unrighteous of Judea slept through the birth of Jesus, one awake and very frightened group of nobodies was given the startling news. The angel said that it would bring "great joy" to everyone. The word translated as 'great' is 'mega'. We have appropriated it to describe a lot of different things in English: for example megaton, megaphone and megalith, and misused it in mega-sale, mega-value and mega-star. (There's even megabucks). However we've treated it, it means a very great deal of something. Yet the world seems pitifully short of any joy at all, even at this time of year.

I can look back to my childhood and remember what an exciting time of year this was: the expectation of happiness when the first decorations went up (coloured paper chains strung across the room in those days), presents being secretly wrapped, and then on Christmas Day waking up to find an old white wartime flying sock pinned to the bottom of my bed filled with the first treats of the day.

But I can also remember standing at a window after the celebrations were over, watching the grey light of an overcast day turn to night and feeling let down and disappointed. Bound up with all the festivities seemed to be promises of a world of peace and harmony that never came. Wars didn't stop. Arguments continued. The normal working week resumed and nothing changed. What I didn't know was that sometime about two thousand years ago the world had indeed changed for ever, when the Son of God was born one night at Bethlehem.

For that was the time that God sent his Son to be with us, to become one of us, and to stand for us; to stand not only for us in death, but to live for us as the perfect Son of the Father, and, while we were all his enemies, reconcile us in peace with God. He came from eternity to our world of time to gather us up to an eternity of love and communion in himself with the Father. He came to us, his own creation, to be one with us so that we might be changed and perfected in him. He laid aside his glory and came to our world as a servant to endure suffering in order to bring us joy.

It's as we see our desperate need and the unending depths of the Father's love and understand the greatness of the sacrificial and everlasting commitment of Christ to us that we find peace and, yes, that promised joy.

So let us pray that we may grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us, God for us, now and for ever, so that joy may be ours, now and for ever.