

Dear Friends,

The bible readings we hear at this time of the year are usually fairly predictable. We hear about the angel Gabriel, we hear about Mary and Joseph and the birth of the baby Jesus, we hear about the shepherds and the wise men. I'd like us to reflect on a different passage today, a passage from the prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 2 v.10-13). It isn't as familiar to us as the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah that we often hear. But it is very appropriate for this time of year.

It starts with a promise from God, "I am coming to live among you". That's what we celebrate at Christmas, God has come to live among us, that's what happened when Jesus was born. The birth of Jesus wasn't just the birth of another baby, in rather more difficult circumstances than usual, in a stable with animals and without the comfort of a bed. God himself has come to us in Jesus, he is present in Jesus in a special way. We can see Zechariah's words coming true when Jesus is born.

He then says, "At that time many nations will come to the Lord and become his people". We can see what has happened since the birth of Jesus. The good news about Jesus has spread all over the world. People of every race and every nation have come to faith in him. The Christian faith is worldwide. It isn't just for some people and not for others, it is a faith for all. People of every race and every type and every background have put their faith in Jesus and have found new life and new hope. Again we can see that those words of Zechariah have come true in the centuries since he spoke.

But then there's the final verse, "Be silent everyone, in the presence of the Lord, for he is coming from his holy dwelling place". This is not a silent time of the year, this is not the happiest time of year for those who enjoy peace and quiet and silence. Most of the things we get up to at this time of the year are quite noisy. Most of our celebrations involve noise and conversation and laughter, even if there will be a lot less of it this year. Even in church we're noisier than usual. When we're allowed to sing carols we sing them loudly and lustily because that's the sort of hymns they are.

But the true wonder of Christmas, the birth of Jesus, is something that we can't really put into words. Zechariah reminds us of that wonder. God loves us so much that he has come to us in Jesus. We know that our words aren't really good enough to express that truth. The Christmas story is so well known, so familiar. But we must never lose our sense of wonder and amazement at how much God loves us.

Wishing you a safe and happy Christmas,

Mark