

- Some words from our first reading. *'All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.'*
- Do you ever feel you are wrestling away at life and it seems to produce little reward?
- A true story from an infant school! There was a teacher who was helping one of her small reception children put his boots on. He asked for help and she could see why. With her pulling and him pushing, the boots still didn't want to go on easily. When the second boot was finally on, she had worked up a sweat. She almost whimpered when the little boy said, "Miss, they're on the wrong feet." She looked, and sure enough, they were. It wasn't any easier pulling the boots off than it was putting them on. She managed to keep her cool as together they worked to get the boots back on -- this time on the right feet. He then announced, "These aren't my boots." She bit her tongue rather than get right in his face and scream, "Why didn't you say so?" like she wanted to. Once again, she struggled to help him pull the ill-fitting boots off. He then said, "They're my brother's boots. My Mum made me wear them." The teacher didn't know if she should laugh or cry. She mustered up the grace to wrestle the boots on his feet again. She said, "Now, where are your mittens?" He said, "I stuffed them in the toes of my boots."
- Some words from our first reading. *'All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.'*
- What would salvation look like for the teacher in my story?
 - An initial answer for her at that particular point might be to remove the little boy, in fact all little boys from her life and transport her to a health spa so she could have a relaxing massage.
 - However let's hope she had gone into teaching because of a love for children and how to help them discover and learn so this might only be very temporary salvation!
 - Perhaps another answer might be the moment when the little boy was finally kitted out, now that they had solved the mystery of the ill-fitting boots, and she had time for a quick cup of tea before the children came in from break time again.
- That seems to imply that salvation is more to do with solving problems than getting rid of them and more about continuing on a journey rather than ducking out.
- And a journey is what John is on in that wonderful and very well-known Gospel reading which we have just heard. *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'* It starts in the beginning and moves forward.
- Before we go any further think what salvation might mean for you.
 - The stereotypical answer for Christians is that salvation is about getting to heaven. However this amazing bible reading seems to suggest far more than that. Rather than being about some distant point in the future it seems to be far more about bringing heaven to earth and about relationships and life today. *'And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory,'* That's about life now rather than life in the future.
- So what might salvation mean for you? What do you hope for? What is the biggest unfulfilled yearning in your heart? How are you going to bring heaven to earth?
 - What stops you feeling fulfilled and at peace at the moment?
 - It might be an anxiety that you have been carrying for years. It might be a divided family relationship that you would do anything to see resolved. It might be freedom from worry about how you are going to pay the mortgage and reach your next set of targets. It might be a burden that you've been carrying that you would love to put down but which you haven't dared to tell anyone else about, so you're still carrying it. It might be hopes for the future which are still unfulfilled.
- Or is life totally perfect for you? If so, you may be walking around with your eyes closed because the world has some much bigger issues to resolve: Freedom from poverty. Justice for the oppressed. A lifestyle that tackles

climate change. The increasing addiction to screens and social media. The problem of increasing resistance to antibiotics and the danger of world pandemic.

- Like the first possible response of the teacher in the story, it is common for you and me to think that we can't do anything about any of these so let's just ignore them, pretend they don't exist and perhaps they'll go away.
- Except they won't!
- So listen to the story of John and the unlikely plan for salvation which God has begun.
 - And again it's all about the journey rather than the conclusion.
- God journeyed towards us and shared the worry and anxiety and failure of our lives. *'the Word became flesh and lived among us'*. He shared all those things we have just been talking about. He also shared the joys and the celebrations of course, but that is part of the solution rather than the problem.
- We're here because a new born baby was born in questionable circumstances in poverty and homelessness in a seemingly god-forsaken enemy occupied village somewhere in the Middle East.
 - Light in a dark place. God's light breaking through into a dark world. *'in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.'*
- We're here because that baby grew up and challenged men and women everywhere by his life, by his death, by his criticisms of the powerful and by his forgiveness of the guilty. And which are you?
 - He came not just for those who met him and heard him but for all humanity. *'in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.'*
 - He came even for all of creation. He made it and he loves it. *'All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.'*
- The tragedy is that so many have just rubbished this baby, ignored him like so many other impotent refugees cast out of the news headlines. Fame for a day then yesterday's news because we can't do anything about it.
 - *'He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.'*
- But the journey for God and for us is not yet complete. The story is not yet ended.
 - And until humanity realizes that God really does provide the solution, the story will remain unfinished. Heaven on all of earth is not a reality yet, but one day it will be.
- But *'to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God'*. And being a child of God implies acceptance, and forgiveness. Regained innocence and direction. Being part of a family and having a parent who shares your worries and your hopes with you and helps you see which are important and which, really, are not.
- You really can see heaven on earth in the baby in the manger. *'we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth'*.
- You really can see heaven on earth today if you know how to look.
 - Love which is sacrificial even if it is not returned.
 - Forgiveness which is unconditional despite being abused time and again.
 - Commitment which means not giving up on something valuable even when it all seems rather fruitless
 - Even the teacher who has successfully helped her pupil to put his boots on himself.
- Surely these are heavenly values?
- I encourage you to acknowledge that you are a child of God and let the light of heaven on earth shine through this Christmas.. You never know it might make change your perception of salvation for the whole of next year.
- A very peaceful and loving Christmas to all of you.