

Lord God, you have broken into our lives through the birth of your Son through the overshadowing of your Holy Spirit. Help us make connections with what that means for our lives today. Amen

- The one thing that we can be sure of is that we can't be sure of anything.
- The major discovery of 2020 is that you can't predict the future.
  - Can we be sure of that?
  - Well it depends where you're starting!
- There was a man driving around country lanes trying to find a tiny village. His phone had died and of course nobody carries paper maps nowadays so he was rather stuck. As he was getting increasingly desperate he saw what could only be a local ambling slowly down the lane, misshapen hat with bits of straw sticking out of it, dirty clothes, a leering grin and outsize wellingtons – he was deep in the country.
- He slowed down, opened his window and asked the way to Little Wallop.
- The local paused for several seconds. You could almost hear the cogs in his brain creaking slowly round. Eventually he said, 'Well if I wanted to get to Little Wallop, I wouldn't be starting from here.'
- Where are you starting from? What is on your mind as you come to church this Christmas morning? And how big is your vision?
- If you were listening to a radio phone in or a survey on television a fairly typical response might be something like one of these,
  - 'It's been such an awful year, I just want to keep safe until the vaccine is given to enough people. I really hope it doesn't take long'
  - 'My nail bar has only been open 2 weeks and then it got shut again. The Government really needs to increase the financial support scheme otherwise it'll be another empty shop on the High St. I really hope it isn't'
  - I don't ask for much but we'd really set our hearts on a week in Spain in December what with our summer holidays being cancelled. And now we're not even getting that. I really hope we get a break in the spring'
  - And slightly more depressingly, 'I'm not panic buying but there's such a logjam at Dover, I thought I'd just pop up to Tesco to stock up on some essentials. I don't know why all these other people have come as well. I really hope they've got what I want.'
- I think if these are the places you are starting from then, it's true, you can't really be sure of anything. You can try and keep cheerful but your hopes could easily be dashed once again.
- I hope that because you're here this morning, your starting point is rather different.
- Let's get it straight. Being hopeful isn't the same as being cheerful and upbeat.
  - If you want to be cheerful, the best thing is to count your blessings at the moment. Remember what you have got or have had, rather than looking at what you haven't. In the greater scheme of things we are so much more fortunate than the vast majority of the population of the world. It's important to remember that and it is the first step towards having a bigger vision. Something outside just your own wellbeing. Count your blessings rather than pin your hopes on anything amazing for the future
- But there is one hope for the future that is reliable. And as I said a minute ago, I hope that you're here today because you are in a state of mind to receive it. Because the sad truth is that much of the population of Britain seems not to be.
- For *'The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all'*, as Paul wrote to his apprentice Titus in this morning first reading. Jesus, the Son of God, the Word made flesh, has been born and the grace of God has appeared.
- This is unlikely to get you the foreign holiday or the large bag of pasta you've been yearning for which is perhaps why so many don't bother with him. Because he doesn't give them what they want. No, he gives them something much much better. He gives them what they need.

- If you want Jesus to wave a magic wand and make it all better, he won't.
- Instead he'll come and share your imperfect life with you. He'll be born in you today. And he'll help you to make sense of life as it is, rather than how you want it to be.
- Conceived in finger-pointing circumstances, carried through danger, born in poverty, raised as a refugee, taught a trade, anointed by God, crowd drawing, he also knew only too well what it was to be rejected and framed, deserted and maltreated, beaten and killed, mocked and ignored as the world went about its unholy business.
  - And we think we've got it bad!
  - Jesus understands!
- It was our sin, our selfish self-centred lives that killed him. But you and I know that. That's why we're here. Because the glorious truth is that this selfless love conquers everything, even the victory of death. He demonstrated that by rising from the dead on Easter Day.
- So if you want to have a sure hope for the future, you've got to make sure your vision is big enough. Something much more than yourself or your own family. A vision that encompasses the whole of humanity and even the whole of creation. Creation, which surely God, whose loves has proved it can conquer everything, will not let be destroyed by our own stupid misuse.
- God does not wave a magic wand. But he does not leave us on our own either. He joins heaven to earth, death to life in one glorious dance and by sharing life; redeeming life; transforms us and prepares us for the Kingdom. *'The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly,'* I'm not very good at that second bit. But it's great to know that he is using me in my own small highly imperfect way to bring in his Kingdom
- *'The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all ... while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.'* And that's a hope that's reliable. Because we know God has come close. That's a hope worth having.
- God will act. The world will be saved. We don't know when. But we do know he will.
- And it all began with a baby in a manger.
- Whether you are on your own this Christmas, or ferrying turkey round to people's doorsteps, thank God for your blessings, keep a big vision, and hold onto a sure hope, Jesus Christ.
- And whatever next year brings, remember Jesus shares it with you and there is nothing that can take that away.
- Have a blessed Christmas. Amen.