

CHRISTMAS DAY 2013

Things are not always what they seem. This has been an exciting year: the 50th anniversary of Dr Who and of the death of CS Lewis. The laser screwdriver; the Tardis, bigger on the inside than on the outside. And CSL - Narnia, where the beautiful Queen who offers the children Turkish Delight...

At Christmas there are things that can also be seen two ways: angels/ manger/ baby

The Angel's sign:

It's in the carol:

*Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, love divine.
Love was born at Christmas, star and angels gave the sign.*

What is the sign? Most people think that the star was the sign - or the angels. But they're not! What did the angels tell the shepherds? That they brought good news of peace on earth and a saviour. And they gave a sign. The angels and the star were not the sign in themselves. The angel told them: "This will be a sign, you will find a baby..." The Child is the sign. He is the symbol of salvation. The one who will set things to rights. Here is what peace in earth will mean, here is the good will from God to us. Here is the sign that will *fit us for heaven* - the baby himself.

Manger

The next place I find another meaning is in the **manger**. An eloquent symbol of poverty and inconvenience. Mary and Joseph had travelled a long way, found no room in the inn and were making do with the stable for the night. So when Jesus was born they used a cattle trough - that's what the manger is - as a cot for the baby. One of the great symbols of this season - the child in a manger. But the meaning of this is open. It is not only the cattle who must feed in this trough, we all must find sustenance here. In this manger is someone who can nourish all our true life, all hopes and desires, when we turn towards him.

The Birth itself

Christmas is about a birth - the delivery of a new life. But Christmas is the celebration of, not one, but two births. We celebrate the birth of Jesus some 2000 years ago ... and we pray that Christ will be born again, not in Bethlehem, but now, in ourselves. In the words of that hymn we sing - we pray that the one in the Christmas story, will "*be born in us today*" because God-among-us is a baby who is real...

Have you seen the nativity scene by Tim Chalk - It's been moved from Princes St Gardens to St Andrews Square. It is ... *A life-size sculpture, it depicts a family taking shelter in a ramshackle shed, with the Mary figure clutching her newborn child close, a look of forlorn contemplation on her face.*

She has the baby over her shoulder, burping him, and his nappy has slipped - so you see his bottom. That is the Christmas message. You can see God's bare bottom. This Christ Child....

The source of all our prayers and blessings. The holy God is revealed to us in flesh. Flesh that needs fed and winded; that needs sleep and needs to be washed and go to the toilet. What we bless God for, on this night of all nights, is for the baby, Jesus, baby, having a sickie all down the back of Mary's blue dress; wetting his swaddling cloth nappies, demonstrating that God is in our skin present among us. In our tender, vulnerable, soft, itchy, inconvenient flesh - God dwells.

In another CSL story in Narnia, the Last Battle - there was (like the Tardis) a stable that was larger on the inside than the outside... And there is one in this world too. This is the large place we come to today to find the sign - the baby/ God himself who will nourish us and give new life.