**Sermon Christmas Day 2020 Annscroft**

I recently read a fascinating book by Professor Paul Nurse who has won numerous awards including a Noble Prize in physiology or medicine.  Paul Nurse is a world expert on living cells which make up the life of every living thing and his work has contributed greatly to the development of the covid vaccines.  The book is entitled “What is life?”  Sadly I understood about a quarter of it  - my late 1940’s sixth form chemistry was not a great deal of help.  Perhaps some of you could make sense of words like ‘invertase’, ‘eukariote’ or ‘adernosinetriplosphate’ , ATP for short, which apparently is life’s universal energy source.   What I found absolutely fascinating is that each cell - far smaller than the eye can see contains millions of protein molecules with what he calls a ‘maelstrom of chemical reactions’ being carried out in every cell at all times.   We are made up of billions of cells, each one boiling with chemical activity yet, with some exceptions, working perfectly together.  **But** Professor Nurse more or less concludes that the answer to the question “What is life” is the living cell.  To be fair, he does raise the question of how creative ideas and emotions could develop saying that we need poets, artists to help - but not philosophers or theologians. He describes himself as a sceptical agnostic and was started on this path by his minister who very foolishly told him he had to take the creation stories in Genesis as being the literal truth.  And although the book is awe-inspiring and taught me a great deal about life if, in the end, we are only a bunch of cells, complex and wonderful though the cells may be, then we are greatly to be pitied.

What has all this to do with Christmas?  The Christmas story starts from a different perspective.  It starts with God.  “The word became flesh and lived among us”; “In him was life, and the life was the light of all people”.   No matter how hard it is to understand or explain, the baby born in Bethlehem is God.  Most of us believe that and believe it emphatically but there may be some who have doubts.  I remember when I was in my late teens talking to a church warden who told me he couldn’t believe in the virgin birth.  I can’t remember what I said to him but my answer now would be, “Don’t worry about it as long as you believe in Jesus who is God and Saviour”.  And that is for most people a decision which in due time we come to know to be true.   So, when we look at the question “What is life?” we look at the baby whose birth we remember today.   “I am the way, the truth and the life”. Said Jesus later in his ministry.

How wonderful that God loves His creation, loves us, so much that He gave up all power and authority and majesty to come and live as a helpless baby utterly dependent on the care that Mary and Joseph gave him, showing us not only what God is like but what the principle of life is.  Not seeking power or authority although we should not be afraid of accepting if we called to it but giving and caring. And, perhaps more important still, something I am very bad at, accepting care.  For God in Jesus accepted the care his parents could give him.

So to go back to Professor Nurse - his discoveries are quite wonderful and the foundation of developments in modern medicine which were never dreamed of last century.  But those discoveries are only a small part of the truth.  There is so much more to be discovered and I believe one of those is the relation between the physical and the spiritual for life is a spiritual thing as well as a physical one. Jesus combined those two perfectly when he was born in Bethlehem.  He took upon himself a human body so complex in its make up combining the physical and the spiritual and showed us what life really is.   And we too can share that life, “I am the way, the truth and the life” “Live in me as I live. In you.’ Jesus said.

So as we come to receive the bread and the wine through which Jesus gives himself, let us pray that we may let Him live in us more and more so that we may become ever more alive.  So, as we remember the baby born in Bethlehem, ket us remember his words spoken during that baby’s ministry on earth, “I have come that they may have life, and have it in all its fulness.”