**Sermon for Christmas Eve 2021 by Rev’d Graham Phillips**

Isaiah 52.1-7

A

wake, awake, Zion,
    clothe yourself with strength!
Put on your garments of splendor,
    Jerusalem, the holy city.
The uncircumcised and defiled
    will not enter you again.
**2**Shake off your dust;
    rise up, sit enthroned, Jerusalem.
Free yourself from the chains on your neck,
    Daughter Zion, now a captive.

**3**For this is what the Lord says:

“You were sold for nothing,
    and without money you will be redeemed.”

**4**For this is what the Sovereign Lord says:

“At first my people went down to Egypt to live;
    lately, Assyria has oppressed them.

**5**“And now what do I have here?” declares the Lord.

“For my people have been taken away for nothing,
    and those who rule them mock,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+52&version=NIV#fen-NIV-18702a)]”
declares the Lord.
“And all day long
    my name is constantly blasphemed.
**6**Therefore my people will know my name;
    therefore in that day they will know
that it is I who foretold it.
    Yes, it is I.”

**7**How beautiful on the mountains
    are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
    who bring good tidings,
    who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
    “Your God reigns!”

John 1.1-14

I

n the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2**He was with God in the beginning. **3**Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4**In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. **5**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26050a)] it.

**6**There was a man sent from God whose name was John. **7**He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. **8**He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

**9**The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. **10**He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. **11**He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. **12**Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— **13**children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

**14**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We have heard these two amazing passages from both the prophet Isaiah and also John’s gospel, which I must admit make my hair stand on end and sends tingles down my back me every time I read or hear them especially at Christmas time. They are such powerful wonderful words, conjuring up all sorts of images. They evoke a strong response in me and tug at my heart strings. The words produce more than we bargained for.

With this in mind let’s think about the main characters in this wonderful story and with each character I want to ask the question “did they get more than they bargained for?”

Mary first - in responding to the angel and saying “Yes so be it. Let the Lord’s will be done.” Did she get more than she bargained for? An instantaneous decision, that had far reaching consequences for herself and her fiancé Joseph. The fear of Joseph turning away from her, of ostracism from society, even death by stoning. Pregnancy much earlier than she might have expected, birth in an unusual place, visitations by shepherds and wise men, a son who changed water into wine, could still the storm and heal all diseases. Then the death on a cross and the amazing resurrection and ascension. As parents we never fully appreciate what we are letting ourselves in when we decide to try for a baby. In saying yes, did Mary get more than she bargained for?

Joseph - said yes after a dream with an Angel. Did he get more than he bargained for? A son that was not his, further Angelic warnings to upsticks and flee 500 miles to Egypt with a new born. A son who was different to others in so many ways, who embodied the love and grace of God. Who called God his father. Did Joseph get more than he bargained for when he said yes?

The shepherds - outcasts of society, looked down upon, not welcomed into homes, respond to an invitation from angels to go and find a new born child lying in a manger. A night they would never forget. Did they get more than they bargained for when they settled down that night to look after their sheep - another cold night keeping watch, keeping vigil? Doing only what they knew?

Wise men - following a star because their teachings, their writings said it was important. So at no little expense of time, of energy and resources, they set out not knowing what to find, when it would end. Just believing that it was important. Did they get more than they bargained for? Meeting with the toddler Jesus would have been an humbling and yet awesome experience- God in human form, fully in this young vulnerable child - what kind of God does this? What a topsy turvy God this is. Did they get more than they bargained for?

So what are you bargaining to get this Christmas? A new jumper? A bottle of wine? Happy time with family and friends? Hoping that it will not be scuppered by COVID? Or will you like the main characters in this story, will you get more than you bargained for? Will you fall in love with this baby Jesus? Will you get an insight into the extraordinary gentleness and trust of God in becoming a human being, the word made flesh? This awesome God, the source of all life, the light of the world, held in the arms of Mary and Joseph, entrusted into their care.

Let the words in this gospel speak afresh into your heart and soul, let them captivate your mind, your thinking. Wrap them like a blanket around yourself and let the truth expressed in them burst forth in songs of worship and joy. For these are words of life, of hope, of trust and faith. These are words that transform us into our true selves. Let all this be and you will indeed get more than you bargained for.

I will finish with the first two verses and verse 14 from our gospel this evening:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

Amen.

Revd Graham Phillips