Out of the brokenness into the light of love

24th and 25th DECEMBER
Isaiah 9: 2 – 7
The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the trampling warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Titus 2: 11 – 14
For 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, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.
He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Luke 2: 1 - 20
In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.
Last year for Christmas, I was given these two wooden angels as a gift by a dear friend.

This year, they've become a central motif of Christmas joy in our home.

Placed on a side table in our family room, they’re at just the right height for my inquisitive toddler to grab hold of carry around the house.

We never quite know where we’re going to find them 😊

Wanting to share with him the real story of Christmas, they’ve become our object lesson.

At 18 months old, we need to keep things simple and straightforward.

So ... Micah, what did the angels say when Jesus was born?

And with a big grin and enthusiastic gesture, comes the reply ...

Yay!

What did the angels say when Jesus was born?

Yay!

It’s the pure joy and delight of childhood faith.

Joy and delight that, while expressed by the angels and experienced by the poorest of the poor who visited the Christ-Child on that holiest night, was overlooked at that stage by the rest of the known world.

Holy joy and delight that, sadly, is still overlooked by much of the world tonight.

It makes the words which have greeted us over the last three weeks, and tonight, even more poignant -

O come O come Emmanuel

And ransom captive Israel

That mourns in lonely exile here

Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice, rejoice, *(sing Yay, sing Yay)*

*Emanuel shall come to you O Israel.*

We gather tonight to praise him with our YAY; to rejoice together and celebrate that Christ has indeed come, that Emmanuel – God with us – has entered the world.

A tiny babe, born a bit over 2000 years ago, not into wealth and power and prestige,

but a tiny babe born into oppression, and darkness, and brokenness;

that – albeit different – is not too far removed from our experience of today.

Over the past three weeks we’ve been exploring how we live in a broken world, worship in a broken Church, and live as broken people,

and yet, even amidst what appears gloomy and glum, we’ve found our YAY.

We’ve rediscovered the hope and peace and joy that is ours to claim as people of faith,

not because it makes us feel better,

but because of the promise and assurance that this tiny babe – God with us – Emmanuel, brought into the world:

HOPE because Christ has indeed come, and Christ is here, and Christ will come again.

PEACE because as the Body of Christ – we, the Church – have tremendous power to infuse conflict and turmoil with peace of God which passes all understanding.

And we SING JOY because it is the only language that can even begin to capture the magnitude of the Divine holding us together.
If only the world and religious society and the everyday man and woman – living at the time of Jesus’ birth - could have known that his birth would be the beginning of their ‘yay’.

Instead, for many, they failed to see that hope and peace and joy had been born.

And they failed to see it because,

*Firstly, their known world was broken –*

We know that the people of God were under the oppressive rule of Rome.

The census taken up by Caesar Augustus was a blatant reminder that the people of Israel were simply second-class citizens in their own country.

*Secondly, their religious life was broken –*

Scattered amongst the faithful were four groups in Israel which sought and fought to lead the people - the Pharisees, the Sadducees the Essenes, and the Zealots.

And the result of these four competing sects in Judaism led to constant friction, increased by the oppressive rule of Rome. Riots were common, and tension was unceasing. Uncertainty permeated their religious life.

*And finally, many themselves were broken –*

They were longing for the Messiah; waiting eagerly for him.

But the last direct word from God they had received was from the prophet Malachi, written in the fifth century BC. The years between were spent searching and waiting and wondering, with many seemingly unable to hold on to any glimmer of the hope and promise that he would come.
Without the word of God present among them in a way they could recognise and understand, the people walked in spiritual darkness.

And then he came, not in the way they were expecting, but he came.

And for many, it took three decades for them to begin to glimpse who this Child truly was, before they even began to realise that he was indeed the long-awaited Messiah.

The truth had been shielded from their eyes and their minds for so long, that it took parable after parable, miracle after miracle, and boundless, extraordinary, unconditional love for them to begin to realise that he was indeed the Light that had come to their darkness, the Liberty that would free them from their oppression, and the Love which would heal their brokenness.

That being said, it was really only after meeting Jesus in the resurrected appearances after his passion and death that his disciples - those who had journeyed most closely with him during the years of his public ministry - began to fully understand that he was indeed the promised Messiah.
In much the same way, we often fail to see what is right in front of us.

So let’s not miss it tonight. Let’s not fail to see what is right in front of us; let us not overlook the Holy One who is present in our midst.

Tonight, as we celebrate the miraculous birth of the Christ-Child,
we gather with hope and peace and joy and love in our hearts,
because we know that these are the very gifts that the Christ was born to give to the world, and to the Church, and to each and every one of us.

We gather in great anticipation, because we hold the promise that Christ will come again and bring these same gifts which will restore and heal the brokenness that is so often so keenly felt.

And as we gather, we pledge that we will carry those same gifts into our world, and our church and our very lives, that others may meet the Messiah that is in us.

Afterall, Meister Eckhardt famously said - *What good is it that Christ was born 2,000+ years ago if he is not born now in your heart?*

As we celebrate once more the miraculous birth of the Christ-Child,
we don our biggest grin and muster up our most energetic gesture,
and together with the angels, we sing out with our hearts and minds and voices – YAY!!!
THE PRAYERS – Steve Mellor

In the light and the bustle of the day we have looked for you.
In the darkness and the stillness of the night, we have longed for your presence.
We have waited for your coming, we have anticipated your being.
And now you come into the world this Christmas Day, yet you have always been here.
Your hope, peace, joy and love overflows. We wait no longer. You are here.

We pray for your broken world, for our broken world.
We have examined our place within the garden of creation.
You gave us dominance over all creation, but we have abused that power.
We have seen the damage we as humans have done and are doing to our planet,
We have seen the animals, birds and insects we have eliminated, the fish and sea creatures we have endangered.
We have allowed economic greed and personal wealth to dominate sustainability.
We have kept your natural riches for ourselves instead of sharing with the poor and the weak.

As a people who have walked in the darkness of this broken world for so long,
We have seen a great light; our eyes have been opened.
In the light of your justice we see hope for our natural world.
In the light of your word we desire peace for our natural world.
In the light of your presence we find joy in caring for your beautiful world.
In the light of your love we embrace your forgiveness and find a desire within us to change.
Your hope is our hope,
your peace is our peace,
your joy is our joy,
your love is our love.

We pray for your broken church, for our broken church.
We have examined our place within the walls of your church.
You have given us the power to bring peace to places of conflict and turmoil, but we have abused that power.
We have allowed others to find terror instead of sanctuary within your church.
We have allowed rules and regulations to prevent us from taking love to the world.
We have seen the damage we, as your people, have done to others, driving them away from you instead of embracing them within the wings of love.

As a people who have walked in the darkness of this broken church for so long,
We have seen a great light; our eyes have been opened.
In the light of your justice we see hope for your church.
In the light of your word we desire peace within your church.
In the light of your presence we find joy in rebuilding your church.
In the light of your love we embrace forgiveness and find within us a desire to change.
Your hope is our hope,
your peace is our peace,
your joy is our joy,
your love is our love.

We pray for broken people everywhere; we pray for our broken selves.
We have examined our place with the peoples of the world.
You give us opportunities to take love to the world, but we have overlooked those opportunities.
We have allowed our personal time and resources to become more precious than love.
We have allowed our personal desires for comfort and security to overtake our willingness to help others.
We have allowed ourselves to be silenced by those who spread intolerance and hate.
We have allowed ourselves to hide in the study and analysis of your word to the point we have made ourselves blind to injustice inflicted by governments and leaders in our name.
We do not live justly, we do not love kindness. So how can we walk humbly with you?

As a people who have walked in the darkness of brokenness for so long,
We have seen a great light; our eyes have been opened.
In the light of your justice we see hope for ourselves.
In the light of your word we embrace peace for peoples everywhere.
In the light of your presence we find joy in helping others.
In the light of your love we find forgiveness and a desire within us to change.
Your hope is our hope,
your peace is our peace,
your joy is our joy,
your love is our love.

You have come into the world this Christmas Day, yet you have always been here.
In the light and the bustle of the day we find you.
In the darkness and the stillness of the night, your presence comforts us.
Your hope, peace, joy and love overflows. We wait no longer. You are here.
Yay!