

The extraordinary in the ordinary

Transforming the ordinary

The more I think about Christmas, the more I'm convinced that it is the extraordinary in the ordinary; this is the story where God leaves heaven and comes to earth. But this is not just a passing visit. This is not just a glance from afar to see what might be happening on some distant planet. This is not some strange incursion from out of space seeing what's out there. This is the EXTRAORDINARY IN THE ORDINARY! This is the Master of the universe, the all powerful, the almighty, the all knowing God leaving heaven and coming to earth, and coming to stay.

This is the extraordinary in the ordinary. We so often look for the spectacular. We so often pray for the spectacular. We so often seek the spectacular. We so often desire the spectacular, and yet God chooses to come in the ordinary. He really is the extraordinary in the ordinary.

John 1 v 1-14 reads

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyman was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

In the beginning..... the God who has always been (who was not created, but eternally is) was there in the beginning. There was no time when he was not. This is the one who created the universe; this is the one who give life to everything and who breathes life into all things; this is the one who is the Master of the Universe; this is the one who left all the glory of heaven and came to earth. This really is the extraordinary in the ordinary. But this was no fleeting visit – he came and lived among us, he came and dwelt among us – he chose to do life with us. This is the extraordinary in the ordinary. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. The circumstances of Jesus birth were so ordinary that most people missed it. A few shepherds on

a hill, a few wise men from the east. The extraordinary in the ordinary almost went unnoticed. Yet God came and dwelt among us - the extraordinary in the ordinary.

This birth would transform lives. Mary would never be the same again. She pondered all these things in her heart, she watched her baby grow and embraced both the joy and the pain it brought her. Joseph would never be the same again. A man of dignity, putting aside his natural response to act upon a dream. Shepherds who went off telling all they had seen and heard because it was just as it had been told them. Wise men going home by a different route, deliberately ignoring the command of a King. This birth would transform lives, and the circumstances of his birth would show us how this baby would live. The extraordinary in the ordinary would follow him wherever he went.

In Luke 4 Jesus went to the synagogue. This was an ordinary thing for him to do – Luke tells us this was his custom, and as was the custom in the synagogue rabbis would stand to read from the scriptures. On this day Jesus reads, and he reads from the prophet Isaiah – words very familiar to those listening. Jesus read: “The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” Then he sat down. He had something important to say and he transformed the reading of a familiar passage of scripture: “today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”. This was the extraordinary in the ordinary. Jesus was saying – ‘I am the one who brings transformation.’

The people asked – but isn’t this Joseph’s son? Isn’t this an ordinary carpenter’s ordinary son? And yet this is the one who brings good news. This is the one who brings freedom. This is the one who can help people see. This is the one who can bring release from guilt and oppression and regret and the burdens we carry. Mathew records some of the greatest words ever spoken by a human being. We call it the ‘Sermon on the Mount’. Jesus sat on a hillside and began to teach. That’s a very ordinary thing for a rabbi to do, but as he spoke that day, he transformed the lives of many who heard him. He looked around the crowd who had followed him and he spoke to them. He said gently, but powerfully – you do realise don’t you, that God is near to you and when I was born in a stable, I came for you. He looked in the eyes of the poor – and he said – you are welcome in my Kingdom.

He looked at the outcasts, the shabbily dressed, the mute, the deaf, the lame, the widows, the thief, the murderer, the physically repulsive, those who smell bad, the twisted, the misshapen, the deformed, the too big, the too little, the too loud, the bald, the fat, the old, the drop-outs, the burn outs, the broken, the drug addict, the HIV positive, the herpes ridden, the barren, the pregnant too many times, the incurably ill, the unemployed, the under-employed, the unemployable, the shoved aside, the lonely, the incompetent, the stupid, the emotionally starved and the emotionally dead, the brutal and the bigoted, the drug Lords and the pornographers, the terrorist, the sadist, the perverted, the filthy and the filthy rich..... and he said ‘ the extraordinary has come in the ordinary - and transformation is possible – and it’s open to you’. For those who heard his words the extraordinary in the ordinary became possible for them whoever they were.

Jesus transformed many lives by doing the ordinary things which became extraordinary. Jesus transformed a night on a lake for a bunch of hardy fishermen by walking to them in the storm.

Jesus transformed the sight of a blind man by mixing his spit with mud and rubbing it on his eyes. He fed 5,000 people with an ordinary packed lunch of 5 loaves and 2 fish. He transformed the life of a woman, probably a prostitute, when she anointed his feet – washing a visitor's feet was a very ordinary thing to do! He then washed his disciple's feet transforming the act and giving new meaning to a very ordinary custom. He shared the Passover meal with his disciples and transformed it into the means by which we today remember his sacrifice for us. He transformed the cruel but ordinary method of killing – the cross - and through it brought the possibility of life. The extraordinary in the ordinary, he came and dwelt among us – he did life with us - and he brought the extraordinary in the ordinary.

That baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger was just the beginning. As he lived his life he brought the transformation by the extraordinary in the ordinary, and because of his death and extraordinary resurrection, the extraordinary in the ordinary is still possible today. Because of the baby in the manger, transformation is possible in your life and mine. Today he looks around and he sees you and he says – you're in – you are riotously celebrated in the Kingdom of God. Yes you are! He came and did life with us ... and he still does. In the storms of life – and there are many – he walks towards us. We can easily miss him – but he is there, and he is quite able to bring about transformation even in the most difficult of circumstances. He comes today to bring freedom – freedom from the guilt and sin that so easily entangles us. We need not go through life burdened with guilt or regret because he can bring about the extraordinary in the ordinary.

There is release when we come to Christ, and just as the birth of a baby in Bethlehem was God keeping the dream alive, so today he is keeping the dream alive – and he wants to do that in you and in me. God still does most of his work by taking ordinary things and transforming them. He wants to meet you in the ordinary things of your life and in them and through them work the extraordinary things of his kingdom. Mary's response to the extraordinary work of God in her ordinary life was – may it be to me as you have said. So how about you?