

Christmas Day Set I

25th Dec 17

Place: 8 and 9.30am St

Marys

All three

Theme: Meeting God

- ◆ How would you like to meet God? Would you like to see God's undisputed action in your life or in the world? If you received the invitation would you be doing something else that day, or would you hurry along?
- ◆ There are lots of different responses to the idea of meeting God, or God breaking through into history in the Bible and lots of different ideas about what it might be like. Many of the prophecies we have read from both the Old and New Testament present it as an awful prospect. One full of terror, punishment and destruction. One of the very ancient ideas about God is that a person cannot look on God and live. There are a few exceptional characters in the Old Testament who this does not apply to; Moses sees God's hindmost parts on the mountain, but then has to veil his face to protect the people from the reflected radiance when he goes back to the camp, because even that would be dangerous for them. Elijah hears the still small voice. Over all however the view is that to meet with God would be utterly terrifying and destructive. It would be violent and completely overwhelming.
- ◆ There are a few places where there is a more positive sense of what God being apparent in the

world might be like. Most particularly in the prophecies of Isaiah and in Jesus's parables of the kingdom.

- ◆ So which is right, does God come to us with punishment and justice or like the gentle dew upon meadows? Is God mighty or gentle?
- ◆ Well both are true, meeting with God, meeting with an angel or angels (God's emissaries) is frightening for a human being – or ought to be. Everyone who sees an angel is told not to be afraid – except Zechariah of course – who foolishly tried to argue with the angel (and by implication God).
- ◆ When people are afraid the first thing the angel says to them is 'Do not be afraid'. Then the message that is given is one of hope and joy. The shepherds are so persuaded by what the angels have to say that they go to see for themselves. And what do they see? They do not see God in might and wrath come to judge and punish, but the tiny Christ Child, God incarnate, emptied of all God's power, come in helplessness and vulnerability, come to save us all. Come to judge us and save us through his vulnerability and humanity.
- ◆ It is not that the writers of the Old Testament and the apocalyptic parts of the New Testament are wrong about the power of God and the inability of any human being to face God. That is all true. But God wants to know us, what's to love us,

above all wants to save us from the mess we make of the world and ourselves. He knows we cannot see him, cannot come to him, so he comes to us.

- ◆ In Jesus Christ God empties himself of his power and glory and comes to us to show us the way to his Kingdom. He comes to show us that love, gentleness and kindness are the way.
- ◆ So how can we find God in our lives? Where can we meet God once we realise our need for God and that we cannot save ourselves?
- ◆ It is intriguing to think about who did and who did not see the Angels and the Christ child on Christmas Day. Most people missed it, they were snuggled up warm in their beds and slept all the way through it, even the other people in the inn.
- ◆ Mary and Joseph were people of prayer. They knew and loved God, and so were willing to make significant sacrifices when God sent angels to them to ask them to serve him in his work of salvation. Because they already, knew and trusted God, they were willing to do what God asked of them; costly though it was.
- ◆ The shepherds were the outsiders, literally outside, in the cold and dark on Christmas eve and they were the ones who saw the full glory of the heavenly host.

If we want to meet with God, this is where we will find him. On the outside, with the lost and those in need. We will find him on the edge.

bringing hope to those who know their need of God. When we do meet him, we will find everything is changed. The world is turned upside down. The outsiders are at the heart of the action. Immanuel, God With us, is a tiny baby in arms. God's greatest power is His love.