**2016-12-18 Sue Diggory**

**Carol Service 2016**

***‘Being a part of God’s story’***

Once again we have gathered here to hear the Christmas story unfold in word and song; through the familiar readings and through wonderful music, both familiar and new.

My thanks to our readers and of course to Graham and the choir who have worked so hard so that we can come and enjoy the story unfold once again,

the story of the coming of the babe of Bethlehem, the one born to be Emmanuel, God with us.

This year has seen a lot of the ‘unexpected’ and ‘unwanted’ – unexpected results in referendums and elections, as political norms have been challenged and changed,

and the unwanted,

* unwanted news of hunger, violence and pain as war and poverty continue to blight so many parts of our planet, and an increasing number of people become its’ victims.

In many ways, we seem to be living in and through dark times, and there is the danger that the celebration of Christmas can be seen just as an escape,

an escape from the reality of the world we are part of,

that is if we are just content to come and hear the story and not to allow ourselves to become part of it, and for us to be changed by it.

Tonight, we have heard how God’s plan for his people unfolded; since the beginning of time itself when ‘*the Word was with God,’*

howdown through the ages the story began to unfold through people like Abraham

through messengers like the prophet Isaiah,

until the time came when a poor teenage girl was willing to say her ‘yes’ and step into the pages of God’s story along with her fiancé, who was willing to join her ‘yes’;

to the time when the scene was set for the final chapter we have heard unfold tonight.

The story of a baby born into poverty,

into a family that had struggled to find a suitable place for him to make his entrance into the world,

a baby whose first visitors were those who were equally poor, a band of rough and ready shepherds,

shepherds who had been out on the hillside when they were given their chance to become part of the story as the angels gave them the news that is at the heart of this story ‘*to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.’*

But this was no ordinary baby, and as we know the shepherds chose to join the story by racing to Bethlehem,

the first of many, who since that day have sought out the child who came as the fulfilment of God’s saving plan for his world;

the one who was the Word that become flesh,

the one who was human as well as divine,

the one who was God in the presence of Jesus,

the one who had come to live among us.

So is that end of the story or are there others chapters that have been added,

are there other chapters that can still be added?

I would like to suggest this is an ever growing and expanding story; a story that has so far added many chapters since that night in Bethlehem,

chapters that include all those who have been willing like Mary to say their ‘yes’ over the last 2,000 years,

all those who have said their own *‘let it be to me according to your word’* and allowed the story to change their lives.

The famous and the unknown, those we read of in the pages of the New Testament and in church history,

and those as they say ‘known only to God.’

As we approach Christmas this year we are once again being asked to join the story

to acknowledge that Christmas begins with Christ,

the time when God came in an unexpected way,

and unwanted by many.

Yet despite this he came

and he still comes

he comes as the one who is the Good News of Christmas, the one who came and comes because he loves us,

and if we are willing to allow his story to become part of us and for us to be changed by him

we will go out from here into the coming days, weeks and months knowing that we can face the unexpected and the unwanted in our lives

because we will not be doing it alone,

that we can and will get through the dark times because we will be doing by being part of the story, his story, the ongoing story of the one whose light shines in the darkness, and whose light the darkness cannot overcome.

Amen.