

Sermon preached by the Priest Pastor  
St Marylebone Parish Church  
Christmas Day 2019

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit

You better watch out, you'd better not cry  
You'd better not pout, I'm telling you why  
Santa Claus is coming to town  
He's making a list, and checking it twice;  
He's gonna find out who's naughty and nice  
Santa Claus is coming to town  
He sees you when you're sleeping  
He knows when you're awake  
He knows if you've been bad or good  
So be good for goodness sake!

I do like a bit of Michael Buble. My Christmas begins by hearing him sing  
'It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas'.

I also like his version of 'Santa Claus is coming to town'.

But I have been thinking about the lyrics of that song, the words I read out at the beginning.

The Santa Claus of popular culture rewards good behaviour.

He KNOWS what our behaviour has been this past year; he's like a red beardy spy,  
assisted by that annoying new character of Christmas, the elf on the shelf.

His love and gifts are entirely conditional – if you've been nice you get the gifts.

If you've been naughty, tough. You get nothing. Especially if you cry.

Those of us who are parents have probably used this technique in the past.

And as we were all once children, we may have inherited that sense of self.

Good equals acceptable equals reward. Naughty gets nothing. Love is conditional.

And I wonder if that is how many people see God.

A big beardy invisible spy in the sky,

who judges and rewards or punishes from on high.

But Christmas is about something entirely different. The eternal God enters time.

The invisible becomes visible. Not as a judgemental old man but as a baby, naked and vulnerable.

The Word becomes flesh and lives among us. Bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh.

Born of a woman through labour, sweat and pain.

Going through babyhood, toddlerhood, adolescence and adulthood.

Tempted. Struggling. Misunderstood. Rejected.

We are not being observed by God in this life, instead, because of the Incarnation,  
we are accompanied.

We are not observed, we are accompanied.

Yes, the babe of Bethlehem grew up, as we must.

Jesus calls each one of us to step out of our comfort zone and follow him

He longs for and helps us to become the best versions of ourselves we can be.

But Christmas is not about whether we are naughty or nice.

It is not about whether we are good, but about whether God is good.

It is all about Grace. Undeserved grace that is not dependent on us.

At Christmas, Divine Love and grace reaches out, and surprises us with joy, through the birth of a Son who is the exact imprint of God's very being, as Hebrews puts it.

John's gospel continues into Chapter 3

'God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved'. We are not condemned, but saved.

Santa says 'You'd better not cry'; But Jesus says 'Cast all your cares on me for I care for you'.

Santa comes down your chimney uninvited. But Jesus stands at your door and knocks, only entering when you ask him in.

Each of us is an Innkeeper who decides if there is room for Jesus.

If you've never asked him into your life, why not do it today, Christmas day?

If you've asked him in already, then why not do it again, today? It's a lifelong process.

Just as in the famous Holman Hunt painting, The Light of the World,

the door to our life gets easily overgrown with the cares and toils of this world.

But Jesus stands there eternally, waiting, full of grace and truth.

If you've been nice this year, well done. If you've been naughty, fear not.

The babe of Bethlehem is born for both. Don't fear, instead, love. Perfect love casts out fear.

The love of Christ shines in the darkness and the darkness will never overcome it.

The words of an old hymn could be a prayer for each one of us on this holy morning

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown, when Thou camest to earth for me;

But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room for Thy holy nativity.

O come to my heart Lord Jesus, There is room in my heart for Thee.

And so, on Christmas Day, remember that you are not observed, you are accompanied.

You are not condemned but saved. And you are deeply loved. Happy Christmas!