



*The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ*  
*Christmas 2020*

When I made my Advent Confession, to prepare to celebrate Christmas free from my barnacle build-up of sludge and slime, my lovely confessor gave me the penance of meditating during Advent on the **poverty of the stable**.

I haven't been able to get that out of my head. In lots of different ways, as I've spent time each day before our crib here in Church. I suggest you do the same, here and before your crib at home. Pause, put yourself in the scene, take a moment to be there in heart and mind.

Anyway, the poverty of the stable...

**In 2020 many of us have become suddenly poor.**

Lost fortunes and businesses. Lost homes and relationships. The 'only just managing' now not managing at all.

Poverty of hope, poverty of affection – starved of touches and hugs. Poverty of being with those we love. Poverty felt as loneliness.

Poverty of solidarity in polarisation, populism and posturing.

This crisis has also exposed how time poor we were before, rushing around chasing our tails. And our communities were poor in the knowledge and love of one another – in time and community and love, many have been enriched in 2020 too.

Through our experience of 2020 all kinds of poverty are converging on this poor little stable in Bethlehem today. Somehow, the rather shakey walls of a 2000 year old lean-to are expected to hold all this together.

And there's more. Along with all the other kinds of poverty there is an intense Spiritual poverty. Jesus said that we should be 'poor in Spirit' (St Matthew's Gospel 5.3), but I think He meant humble and open to God, rather than what we see today. A whole generation that lacks the language (to think let alone *articulate* what it means) to engage in a real spiritual life.

So in our poor little stable we dump on the poverty of the Holy Family wheelbarrow loads of our poverty of all kinds.

**2020 has exposed and created all kinds of poverty. But by bringing our poverty to the stable of Bethlehem, we are not lost. This little family *can* and *does* hold all that.**

The poverty of the stable reveals that God chooses to dwell in poverty. St Paul tells us 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich' (2 Corinthians 8:9)

In crisis, in the bleak midwinter and the heavy grinding drabness;  
in the Christ Child we find the untold riches of eternal life, complete love, purpose and belonging, even as we tread into January and February.

This child radically reshapes our reality as human beings doing life together on this strange rock spinning in space.

He doesn't ignore our poverty, throw us some loose change or comforting platitudes, He *inhabits* that poverty of being so utterly that it is redeemed.

We go into this Christmas and 2021 tired, a bit beaten up, a little confused (probably) and (certainly) uncertain.

But we have, **in this tiny hand reaching for us from a feed trough** some 20 centuries and a few thousand miles \*that\* way, we have a companion on the Way who has already taken the burden and reality of it all, who promises that hope and love beat death in the game of cosmic top trumps, and has proved it, sealed in the new covenant of His own blood.

**We have an invitation to step boldly into a lifelong friendship with the One in whom our poverty is met and transformed.**

It's all here: mystery of mysteries. No need for shame, or fear or holding back. A life's worth of discovering and unfolding and even then we only begin to *glimpse* the reality

of this so great a truth.

Sir John Betjeman puts it better than I ever could, especially this year. Familiar words, but always worth hearing. I'll give him the last word.

And is it true? And is it true,  
This most tremendous tale of all,  
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,  
A Baby in an ox's stall ?  
The Maker of the stars and sea  
Become a Child on earth for me ?

And is it true? For if it is,  
No loving fingers tying strings  
Around those tissued fripperies,  
The sweet and silly Christmas things,  
Bath salts and inexpensive scent  
And hideous tie so kindly meant,

No love that in a family dwells,  
No carolling in frosty air,  
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells  
Can with this single Truth compare -  
That God was man in Palestine  
And lives today in Bread and Wine.