

Sermon by the Families Lead for Christmas Eve, Children's Mass with Christingle. 24/12/2020.

Throughout Advent, Young Church has been focusing on the name "Emmanuel", a name that a certain prophet says will be given to special baby: "But the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son, and she will name him Immanuel". It is the name destined to be given to Jesus, the Son of God. **Can any of the children present today tell me what it means?**

It means "God is with us". This is the message of Christmas, that God has descended from heaven to be with us, through all our joys and pains, not just for one day but forever. Today, Jesus comes to us through the Eucharist, the bread and wine. Whenever we share in the Eucharist together, we are again asking God to be with us, as individuals and as a church family.

The name Emmanuel comes from a time, written about in the Old Testament, when God felt very far away. The Book of Isaiah is named after a prophet who lived in the 8th Century BC, over 700 years before Jesus was born. The message in this book is one of hope, that even though terrible things are happening, God will rebuild the holy city Jerusalem and all shall be well.

We'll come back to this message of hope from Isaiah in a moment.

Today is our First Mass of Christmas with Christingle. **Can anybody tell me what a Christingle is?** Yes, it's an orange with a red ribbon or tape round it, decorated with sweets and a lit candle on top.

[You get even more points if you can tell me what they represent!]

The orange represents the world, the red ribbon the love of Christ, the sweets all of God's creation, and the lit candle Jesus' light in the world. I looked pretty weird buying 60 plus oranges in Waitrose for our service today, and while I was queuing to pay I started thinking about what these oranges represent: our world. And then my mind wandered to a news article I read recently, which said there might be a shortage of citrus fruits soon because of import delays at Dover, the first stop for a lot of our food imports from Europe.

You might have noticed there's a BIG Christingle in front of me, except it is sadly broken into two parts. Everything we do at the moment takes more time and is a lot more difficult. Our world doesn't feel whole, but broken into pieces. Everything from buying an orange to seeing a friend outside includes a warning label: proceed with caution.

The people being spoken to in the Book of Isaiah knew what that felt like. They were being warned about their homes being taken away, about becoming separated from family and friends, their religious buildings, and even the Temple in Jerusalem itself! As if that's not

enough, they were told this is a punishment from God because they hadn't been doing the right things. They may have been doing all the correct *religious* things, like giving sacrifices to God, but they weren't actually following him with their whole hearts: they had turned away. As a result, they were going to lose everything and it was all their fault. Basically, their world was being broken in two, just like ours feels broken in pieces at the moment.

However! Towards the end of the Book of Isaiah, there's a message of faith, hope and love. **Would somebody like to come up and read it out for everyone?**

“You will be like a beautiful crown in the Lord's hand.

You will be like a king's crown in your God's hand.

You will never again be called the People that God Left.

Your land will never again be called the Land that God Destroyed.

You will be called the People God Loves.”

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, that future day talked about in Isaiah gets a lot closer. “You **WILL** be like a beautiful crown”, “You **WILL** be called the people God loves”. This becomes “You **ARE** a beautiful people”, you “**ARE** called the people God loves”. We can say with confidence, because of Jesus, that we are a people God loves, that he holds us close to him. He came down from heaven as a vulnerable baby to be with us, now and forevermore.

Through time God continues to bring his people, to bring US, into a closer relationship with him. It may feel that he is far away, but he is here with us today. **And to end our talk, who would like to come up and stick the two pieces of our Christingle together?**

And as that happens let's remember that God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is continually bringing everyone in the world closer to him.

Amen.