

A Message for Christmas

ONE hundred years ago, the world was still suffering the effects of the Great War. It had not been 'over by Christmas', and for years following the 1918 Armistice, many hard questions were asked of both man and God. Yet there was another question gripping the nation, one which to this day we hear throughout the Christmas pantomime season: "Do you believe in fairies?" Between 1917 and 1920 two little girls, Frances and Elsie from Cottingley near Bradford, claimed to have seen – and photographed – fairies at the bottom of their garden. Maybe the ensuing 'Fairy Fever', which fascinated Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and other great names of the age, was a welcome relief from the grim realities of war.

Something similar had happened in 1914, when Arthur Machen's entirely fictional short story, *The Bowmen*, gave rise to the belief that other winged, ethereal beings had protected British troops at the Battle of Mons. To this day, some still speak of the Angels of Mons as if the story were factual. Years later, even though Elsie and Frances admitted the fairies in their photographs had been faked, they still implied to the end of their lives that they had indeed met the Little Folk. In 1922, the author GK Chesterton was received into the Catholic Church by his friend, Monsignor John O'Connor, a priest in our Diocese of Leeds. Chesterton found the ardent atheism of post-war Britain to be a paradox, especially when people who denied the existence of the Holy Spirit replaced the transcendent void which that created with a belief in almost any kind of unholy spook! Christian faith is not belief in the unbelievably far-fetched: it is demanding and has consequences. Shepherds living a poor and tough life aren't given to flights of fancy, yet more than 2,000 years ago, a group of them claimed that they had seen an unearthly bright light and heard an angel speak to them. They had nothing to gain, and in fact had everything to lose. Jeopardising their meagre livelihoods by leaving their sheep at the mercy of thieves and wild animals, and opening themselves to ridicule or even being stoned to death for blasphemy, they ran to tell everyone that the Son of God had been born to a carpenter's wife – in a stable!

Angels appearing to humans as God's messengers is a belief common to Jews, Christians and Muslims as well as to several other faiths. They are often depicted as 'heralds' with trumpets, announcing important news. The word 'angel' is used today in many comforting, euphemistic ways by non-believers, not yet ready to encounter God, but still prepared to meet His messengers halfway. Although the angel's appearance to the shepherds was extraordinary, the angel's message was simple: that a child was born; who that child really was; and, where they could find him. The song sung by the angelic chorus was equally simple: give glory to God and peace and goodwill to one another. At this time of year, the message of peace and goodwill resonates in both Christian and secular stories

Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* may not mention Jesus by name, but at its core is the moral of spiritual admonishments warming a cold heart and warning a cold world. The Bible recommends being hospitable to strangers, in case we are '...entertaining angels unawares'. Jesus went even further when He said that when we show loving kindness to those who may seem the hardest to love – the homeless, the stranger, the prisoner – we are actually doing these actions to Him. This is shown in the story of St Martin of Tours, whose Feast Day may deliberately have been chosen as the day on which to sign the First World War Armistice: November 11. Martin was a Roman soldier and on a cold winter's night took pity on a homeless beggar. He cut his own warm cloak in half and shared it with the poor man. Later, in a vision, he saw Christ wearing the half-cloak and, from that day on, Martin became a man of peace. Whether trumpeted or tweeted, we love to share good news with friends at our side; and when troubled by bad news, we need someone on our side. A true friend is not one whose love for us depends on our love being given in return. A true friend will be there for us when all others have judged and rejected us. Christians believe that true 'friend' is Jesus – but even those who are not yet prepared to accept His friendship can enjoy keeping His Feast. Fairy, angel or star: whatever you call the glittering form atop the Christmas tree, may it be a reminder of the Good News of God's message of peace and goodwill to you this Christmas. And I believe that's no fairy story! *Bishop Marcus Stock*

Welcome to St Joseph's this Christmas

Welcome to all who celebrate the birth of Jesus with us over these few special days. We hope that you experience something of the love, warmth and joy of the Christ child through the worship of our little community here at St Joseph's. We gather around the Altar and the Crib to celebrate God who becomes flesh for all the world. This is good news for all of us. In Christmas we remember that God is not some distant figure but an imminent reality who seeks to enter into the mess of our lives and the brokenness of our world. Nobody is far from God because God comes to us where we are and bids us to follow him and be transformed by his love. May your visit to the manger this day be a renewal in your journey with Jesus.

Have a wonderful Christmas and may God's blessing be with you and all of your friends and family

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Masses over the Christmas Period</u></p> <p><u>24th December- Christmas Eve</u> 8pm 'Midnight Mass' by Candlelight</p> <p><u>25th December- Christmas Day</u> 9:15am Mass of the Day</p> <p><u>26th December- St Stephen- First Martyr</u> 11am Mass (With special focus on our Altar Servers)</p> <p><u>27th December- St John the Evangelist</u> 9:15am Mass</p> <p><u>28th December- The Holy Innocents</u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Crib Offerings</u></p> <p>Following a parish vote we will support the Aid to the Church in Need this year.</p> <p>ACN supports Christians who experience persecution because of their faith. In many places today Christians risk their lives to live out their faith.</p> <p>Offerings can be placed in the bowl in the Crib and will be sent to the charity in January. Cheques can be made payable to <i>Aid to the Church in Need</i>.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>New Years Day</u></p> <p>This is also the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (The oldest feast day of Our Lady). We start the new Year with Mass at 11am on 1st January. This is a great way of committing 2019 to God</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>St Joseph's throughout the year</u></p> <p>St Joseph's is a very lively little parish. We have lots going on throughout the year. Keep in touch through our website- www.monkskirbystjoseph.org Or matthewpittam@yahoo.co.uk</p> <p>We also have a parish Facebook Group- contact Fr Matthew to join</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Usual Weekly Masses</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sunday- 9:15am Monday- 7pm Tuesday- 10am Friday 7pm</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Thank you</u></p> <p>Thanks to all who helped prepare our Church this Christmas and all who help run our parish during the year. Special thanks to, Steve and the altar servers, Liz Hewitt, Mary Margaret and the flower arrangers, Dunstan and the singers, The gardening group, The Union of Catholic</p>	

Mothers and all who work hard in our parish during the year	
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