**Daily Prayer & Encouragement Wednesday 23rd December**

(Philippians 2: 7-8)

He "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself…"

Before the world was created, Jesus was God, and after the winding up of all things on earth, he will still be God. Yet he chose to become human. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us", John says at the start of his Gospel.

I keep thinking of the practicalities of what this meant that moment in Bethlehem. Jesus was born in a cattle shed - an out-house to an inn. It might well have been as squalid as some of those ramshackle huts we see on our TVs when they report from refugee camps in the Middle East. How long before the birth Mary and Joseph were there we are not told: days, weeks, maybe even a month or more. There was the blood and the human debris that accompanies birth. There might well have been animal waste. There were no anaesthetics for Mary or modern sterilising techniques to ensure a safe delivery. Perhaps a woman from the community helped Mary; perhaps it was Joseph, managing not to faint, helping with the unaccustomed process. They put the little, vulnerable infant into an animal feeding trough because there was no cot. If oxygen was needed, it came from the air around them, mixed with human and animal sweat. Mary and Joseph, and Jesus, had straw to lie on, if they were lucky. The swaddling clothes were basic at best: they would have been as clean as possible, but not up to the standards we would expect. That night their space was invaded by a group regarded roughly as the down-and-outs of society of their days - the shepherds.

In our minds, and certainly in our nativity plays, we tidy this all up. As specially clean ox and ass gaze on peacefully, as ultra clean parents study the washed and comfortable little baby ("no crying he makes" - maybe? Hmm, not sure about that). The feeding trough becomes a neat and tidy manger. The odd angel pops in to offer background support to the mother who miraculously stands or sits in total comfort, spick and span, adoring the little baby boy. The shepherds have all had showers and are in their best shepherds' outfits before being allowed into the very tidy stable, with only fresh straw artistically decorating the scene. If there ever was a midwife, she's long gone, and Mary and Joseph have had time to tidy up in case of unexpected admiring visitors.

The centre of all this however (the reality and the nativity play), is God - the Son. I find it incredible but wonderful that He gave up everything to risk everything for you and me. We don't know, but perhaps as a child he had Measles or Mumps, aches and pains, bumps and bruises. He was cleaned and dressed by his parents. He had to be potty-trained. Yet all the time "through him all things were made". No wonder "the world did not recognise him".

There was, of course, a purpose behind all this: Jesus gave himself to become human as a sacrifice to save us. It makes the sacrifices we have had to put up with these last months, and for a few months more, seem very small scale!

I love the way the words of the 1864 hymn, "Thou did'st leave thy throne" sum so much of it up, as we give thanks to our Lord for all that He has, does, and will do, for us.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4Bf0IowI3k>

*So, for our prayer, let's spend a few moments thinking of what Jesus gave up for us, and thanking him for it.*

Will Pyke