



Bishop Michael's Christmas Message 2003

He becomes like us so that we may be like him

It is natural for us to want people to be like ourselves. When they are, we feel less threatened. When they are different we feel uneasy. God's ancient people sometimes felt like that. They wanted the rest of the world to be like them: to worship in the way they did, to follow their Law, to revere their Temple and so on.

Today, we too can be the same: we want people to come to our churches (especially at Christmas time), to join in our way of worshipping and generally to behave like us.

By contrast, the Christmas story tells us that God does not wait for us to come to him. He comes to us, becoming like us, even to the point of being a helpless and dependent new-born babe. God identifies completely with our situation, accepts us as we are and wants to embrace all in his self-giving love. This is a challenge to the Church and to Christians. Are we following Jesus out into the world he came to save or do we always prefer the cosiness of our churches? Are we simply expecting people to come to our churches or will we go out to them? I know some of you will be going out with the Christmas message of God's gift to supermarkets, street corners, car boot sales and pubs. Some will be especially active where people are in need; in prison or hospital, the homeless and the housebound. This is living the Christmas story as well as preaching it.

It is also true, of course, that God becomes like one of us in the infant Jesus so that we might become like him. The point of Christmas is not just that God becomes like us but also that we may be transformed into his likeness. When we are accepted and included, we are not left in our original state. Some, like St Paul, are changed quite suddenly and dramatically. More often, however, the change is gradual, with many setbacks and periods of spiritual slackness. We can be sure, however, that he has come to us with 'healing in his wings'. When we turn to him, stay with him and are friends with him we begin to heal and to become more and more as he wants us to be. Let us pray for Jesus' healing power in our lives this Christmas so that we may fulfil all the potential which God has given us.

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