Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my deliverer.

Please sit.

Now, who was visited by Father Christmas last night? Did he leave you what you wanted? …..and were you left anything you needed? Did you find the Elf on the shelf this morning?

So apart from lots of presents, all the food your parents have been preparing and the additional visitors you may be hosting or going to visit today, what else are we celebrating today and why are we here?

Ok, baby Jesus is born. Where was he born? What type of place was it? Who was there with Mary and Joseph? Do we know who visited the baby Jesus? *Suggest angels, shepherds, flocks of sheep. One of the angels tells the shepherds that a saviour who is the messiah Christ the Lord is born this very day in the city of David – Bethlehem.*

So that’s the story we are familiar with and our crib scene shows that view we know so well. we can see the main characters can’t we, including the Wise Men who we tend to remember particularly at the Epiphany on 06 January.

However, our reading this morning does not quite explain the arrival of Jesus in the same way. If you are used to Carol Services you may well be familiar with the words that herald the arrival of the Jesus but nevertheless the passage does seem to be a bit like reading code.

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s son, full of grace and truth. This is John’s method of introducing us to Jesus.

The narrative accounts of Jesus’ birth only appear in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. In the case of Luke, we view the birth through the eyes of Mary, while in Matthew it its through the eyes of Joseph. Mark jumps into his Gospel with the adult Jesus meeting John the Baptist and being baptised by him. John’s introduction takes a much longer lead in, with a deeper more reflective message starting with these somewhat strange words which at first hearing can be quite baffling. Right from the very start.

The opening words, for instance – “in the beginning was the Word” . With these words we know that we are entering a place that is both familiar and strange. This passage is frequently used at Carol services and familiar for that reason but doesn’t necessarily mean we comprehend what John is saying. If you know your way round the Bible then you will know that those words take you right to the very start of the Bible to verse 1 of Genesis “in the beginning”. “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” . Whatever else John is going to tell us, he wants us to see his book as the story of God and the world, not simply the story of one character in one place and time.

John’s book is about the creator God acting in a new way within his much-loved creation. It’s about the way in which the long story which began in Genesis reaches the climax the creator had always intended.

And John does this through “the Word”. In Genesis 1, the climax is the creation of humans, made in God’s image. In John’s Gospel, the climax is the arrival of **a** human being, the Word become ‘flesh’.

When I speak a word, it is in a sense, part of me. It’s a breath that comes from within me, making the noise that I give it with my throat, mouth and tongue. When people hear it, they assume I intended it. “But you said……” and we are judged by whether our words match our deeds. And in an age when everything is recorded and can be played back endlessly, what you say or have said remains indefinitely and can be used against you any number of years later. Speeches can and are edited to change the meaning of what was actually said at the time or cut and edited to imply something never intended by the speaker.

In the Old Testament, God regularly acts by means of his ‘word’. What he says, happens – in Genesis itself and throughout. “then God said” “and God said”. God spoke creation into being. “by the word of the Lord, says the Psalm, the “heavens were made” (no 33.6). God’s word is the one thing that will last even though people and plants wither and die (Isaiah 40.6-8). God’s word will go out of his mouth and bring life, healing and hope to Israel and the whole creation (Isaiah 55.10-11). That’s part of what lies behind John’s choice of “Word” here, as a way of telling us who Jesus really is.

“word” may sound abstract but John is telling us that “word” isn’t an abstract principle, it’s a person.

John is stressing that the Word was and is God and is intimately close to God. He’s stretching the use of Word beyond our general understanding of it but he does that because Jesus makes it necessary to use language in a peculiar way because there is no other way of introducing Jesus to us. So, the word became flesh and lived among us is telling us that Jesus is identical with the Word, who was there from the very start, the Word through whom all things wee made, the one who contained and contains life and light. The word challenged the darkness before creation and now challenges the darkness that is found, tragically, within creation itself. It’s the Word that is bringing into being the new creation, in which God says once more, ‘Let there be light’.

But when God sends the Word into the world, the world looks the other way and pretends not to recognise him. when God sends the Word specifically to Israel, God’s chosen people, they don’t recognise him. This is the crux of the Gospel dominating its pages. God’s chosen people do what all other people do: they prefer the darkness to the light.

If you return to Genesis and the arrival of humans, in chapters 2 and 3, we read that rather than live in the light, we quickly chose to follow the path of darkness rather than that of light. The God given ability to choose takes us off into the wilderness, the darkness. We trust what the serpent tells us rather than what God tells us : is that the first fake news story?

The most exciting part of this passage is that we are in it too. “to anyone who did accept him” and continues to accept him . You don’t need to be born into a particular family or come from some specific part of the world. God simply wants people from everywhere to be born in a new way, born into the family which he began through Jesus and which has since spread throughout the world. Anyone can become “a child of God”

Somehow, and John tells us, step by step, how, the great drama of God and the world, of Jesus and Israel, of the Word who reveals the glory of the unseen God – this great drama is a play constantly looking for actors with parts for each and everyone of us.

John’s job is to point the way to God, to Jesus.

So when we are told that the baby born of Mary was in the beginning and the One through whom all things were made, we are able to see that the child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger is the One through Whom God is making a new beginning and a new creation. Amen