**Stowe Church Carol Service Dec 20th 2023**

Luke 2:1-20

Our Bible reading tells us the story of Jesus’ birth – the nativity, which is at the heart of Christmas celebrations all over the world. It’s a lovely, familiar story of a baby being born over 2,000 years ago.

But as we know, it is so much more than a wonderful, familiar story. Because that nativity is for us today and Jesus is still with us today through the Holy Spirit.

So I have chosen 4 brief points:

1. Jesus’ birth was all part of God’s salvation plan. Prophecies hundreds and hundreds of years before foretold that God would send a Saviour, a Messiah to rescue human beings from their sin and to bring them back to God, and Jesus’ birth was the fulfilment of these prophecies. God has a long term plan for his creation, and that gives us a security like nothing our transient world can give us. Because He is the creator of everything and His plan is based on love.
2. Jesus Christ, Saviour of the world, King of King, Prince of Peace was born in a humble stable to a poor working class mother. God did not choose wealth and status for His son. He chose good, ordinary people – Mary and Joseph – who trusted and obeyed Him. It was their hearts that mattered because they had a heart for God.

And that’s true for us today; some of us will be materially better off than others, and we all have different gifts and abilities, but what is important is do we have a heart that is open to God? Do we trust and obey Him?

1. Baby Jesus was visited by two very different groups of people – the shepherds and the wise men. Two very different types of people socially and materially. The shepherds were poor and often looked down upon in their society, whilst the kings or wise men were rich, wise and looked up to. The shepherds heard the good news from the angels and the wise men followed the star – both knew that God’s son had been born and they both reacted in the same way; they stopped what they were doing and travelled to the stable to see for themselves.

As we hear the wonderful Christmas story proclaimed every year, have we, like the shepherds and the wise men, gone to see for ourselves? If you have not yet let Jesus into your life can I recommend that you come and see for yourselves because He really is wonderful.

1. Finally, Jesus’ birth is in many ways just the beginning of the story. Because that little baby grew up to change the world, to bring salvation, to show us how to live and what is truly important, and to reconcile us back into relationship with God.

The wonder and joy of the nativity does not end when we pack away our decorations for another year. Because Jesus, our Saviour is here with us every day, every year, loving us for all eternity. So when I wish you a Happy Christmas, I really mean it!