

**2026 New Year message**

*<sup>28</sup> Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: <sup>29</sup> "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*

*<sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: <sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." [Luke 2:28-32]*

The post-Christmas stories in the birth narratives of Jesus has the 'slaughter of the innocents' in Matthew's gospel (2:13-18) and the presentation of Jesus in the temple in Luke's gospel. In the current genocidal tendency of Gaza, by the ones who worshipped in the Temple, Matthew and Luke give us a truth we sometimes forget in on our little island off the Eurasia peninsular; the world is a violent and sad place where refuge is sought and peace is yearned for. From Gaza to Venezuela, Iran to Sudan, Bangladesh to Ukraine people shelter from the storms inflicted upon them by the powers and dominions of men.

Jesus comes to bring salvation and peace, not to a few white evangelical Christians, but to all, men, women, black, white, indeed, as St. Paul tells us, to bring peace to the whole of the creation that groans to be released. Jesus was born at a time of violent warfare and he died a violent death, the Christmas story and the cross are remembered by Christ's disciples; the poverty of birth and acclamation of lowly shepherds, the giving of gifts by wise men, the presentation in the temple releasing Anna and Simeon, and the telling of the 'new' Moses in Matthew's gospel, the slaughter of the innocents echoing the killing of all Hebrew babies (Exodus 1:8-22) with the flight of Jesus into Egypt, the land where Moses came to prominence and the leading of God's people to freedom and safety, to the place of salvation, the land of bread and honey.

The story of Jesus survives all of this violence and his constant call for us to be blessed as Peacemakers and to hunger and thirst for righteousness whispers through every generation.

God, in Jesus, enters this war-filled world and reveals Godself through Jesus the Jew, who died and rose again for all; for he is a light of revelation to the Gentiles, to you and I.

One of the many things I cherish about Jesus in the Biblical witness is his encounters with women. He reveals himself to a woman at a well, he takes a scolding from a desperate mother, the first to recognise Jesus as the Resurrection and the life is Martha, the women at the tomb, the constancy of Mary; and looking at television pictures of White House decisions and a large Moscow table, the noticeable thing is the lack of women. It is literally Men of War, yet the message of Jesus, 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth' is needed now more than ever.

So, what can we 'do' at the beginning of this new year when so many things seem beyond our control? Well, we can care for the widow, embrace the foreigner, stand up for women's rights which seem to be under threat, for those in their embrace of discovering their sexuality, identity and even gender. It is in the day-by-day prayer and seeking to be aware of others and allow each person to flourish in the best way they can ... at a recent 'warm hub' someone came and was so grateful because she hadn't spoken to another human being since Christmas Day. The Methodist Church seeks to be and *is* a 'justice-seeking, inclusive Church.'

It is those 'little' acts of kindness, those small steps along a road that may reach an extra mile, visiting the lonely, the dis-abled, the voiceless, the campaigning on behalf of others, and being aware that God has sent the Holy Spirit as power, humbly calling us to determined service, service that we are reminded of as we say the words of The Covenant within our Methodist expression of worship.

Indeed, this goes beyond our fellow human beings; 'for God so loved the world' (John 3:16) as we are called to care for the soil, the trees and the very atmosphere around us. Today, and tomorrow, and every day may we know that in our own small way God enables us to create earth as it is in heaven.

I am proud to be the Superintendent Minister of a Circuit that takes seriously the call to care for the world and all. From gold-winning eco-Church at Wesley in Chester City Centre (do sign up for the eco-Church discussion on Zoom on January 20<sup>th</sup>) to the difference solar panels are making at Frodsham. From pastoral visitors in Churches to Local Preachers sharing the good news of God's love and grace, from Trinity Safe Space to Helsby's Friday Drop-In, it is a privilege to know that so many are like Simeon, knowing that salvation has come in Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, who continues to shine in the darkness of this world.

May we all create a little light this coming year.

Gordon