

Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church, Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Canon Geoff Read on Christmas Eve 2025

Bible text: John 1:1-14

How up are you on the English language Word of the year?

It depends on your source and which side of the pond you are ...

In US, Merriam Webster word of the year is “slop” while in UK the Oxford University Press word of the year is “rage bait” just ahead of “aura farming” and “bio hack”

“Slop” is about the all the low grade, AI generated stuff that passes across our smart phone screens - the inane, the banal, dare I say kittens and would-be celebrities which so often creates in us a deadening weariness

by contrast “rage bate” is about online content deliberately designed to elicit from us anger or outrage by being provocative, outrageous

But both are about the impact of communication on us, including the power of words



At the heart of all we are gathered here this evening to remember and celebrate is communication, relationship: the power of the Word

Throughout the Bible story of God, we see the power of words to not just speak but also to create and bring into being, to act and transform

In the beginning, in the story of origins we call Genesis how does God create? - by speaking: and God said, let there be ...

And now here in one of the four stories about Jesus that we call the gospels - written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and also John from which we heard just now - it is through the metaphor of Word that we are invited to understand the birth of Jesus: God not only speaking but acting

And that acting is of a very specific sort - not the impersonal power of some AI generated image or content

But the most personal sort - rooted in time and space - and flesh

It's the fact of the incarnation, God somehow becoming one of us, arriving in the same way each one sitting here did - as a baby at a particular time and place, into a web of relationship, culture and history

“The Word became flesh and lived among us ...” (v14)



And like “slop” and definitely “rage bait” this Word seeks to draw out a response from hearers too
Some will recognise, accept, receive him

Others not

If you read two of the gospels, Matthew and Luke, we read of some of those original responses, the wholehearted receiving and the wholehearted rejecting and all points in between

At one end of the spectrum, it all starts with Mary - her Yes rather than No to the angel's invitation

Shepherds who rejoice with great joy, running to see, then running to tell

Magi from the east travelling hundreds and km over hundreds of days, worshipping, gifting

At the other we meet Herod, the dangerous autocrat and his violence machine hell bent on destroying anything and anyone - even babies - who could be a threat to his power

And in between we read about a whole range of responses

an evolving struggle towards a Yes for people like Joseph - the struggle between religious convention and sticking by Mary

Think of maybe inn keepers - No room, Joseph's own family - unmentioned, but why was there no room with them in a culture that prized family relationship - maybe a response to the stigma of perceived illegitimacy?

All are in different ways responding to this child and the message He enfleshes

A message that, in Jesus' life that follows, broadens and deepens all the way up to His dying and rising

This message, according to John in our reading, is the “power to become children of God ...”

The children of God bit is wonderful - it's about waking up to a “more to life” beyond just what we see and feel in our 24/7 lives

To wake up to God - His love, His purposes and also, it says, His power

Power to become children of God and power be children of God, to live that way

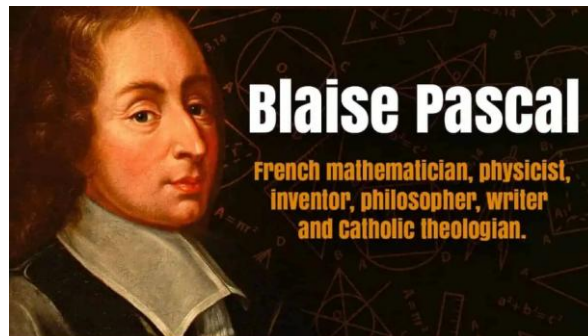
At the heart of Christmas is this simple message: God was with us in a historic moment in Jesus
and God is with us, now and intimately, at the deepest part of our being

But we do need His power to not only wake up and become his children but also to then live that way, to be His children

Being a child of God does not mean we will never face problems or feel fear as, for example, we sit awaiting news in a doctor's waiting room, or as we scroll through news of the ever-worsening geopolitical events that seem set to only continue into 2026

What it does mean is that we know in the joys and mess of our daily lives that we do not face these things alone

If we are God's children, then He bids us call Him "Father"



Back in C17 France, just after the brutal Thirty Years War the Christian philosopher, physicist, and inventor Blaise Pascal wrote these words after reflecting on his own lived experience

"All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone ..."

At the heart of being human is a restlessness

Pascal would say this arises from a God-given desire - a desire to consciously be who we have been made to be by God - his children

But unaware of this, distracted from this, we seek to meet this restlessness with so many different things - many of which prove to be both toxic and destructive

If human beings suffered from distraction back in C17 France, how much more today carrying in our pockets our smart phones, what one writer calls weapons of mass distraction, symbols of that inability to sit quietly alone and know deeply who we really are, the message of this Christmas night - children of God

When asked how to pray, Jesus responded with what we now call The Lord's Prayer

which begins "Father in heaven ..."

In the spirit of Pascal, the great experimenter may I invite you to an experiment over this Christmas season and beyond, to tap into this power

as you awake first thing and switch on the light or as, last thing, you switch off the light ready to sleep may your first or last conscious thought be shaped not by "slop" or "rage bait" on your phone but with this simple word: "Father Father in heaven ..."