

Sermon A for Christmas for 2016.

A Happy and Holy Christmas to you all.

God has come among us as one of us.

God is with us.

This is the personal message of Christmas. The one that the baby in the manger delivers.

God is with us.

The message in 2016 remains as new and as fresh as it ever was. It never tarnishes nor dulls with age.

And perhaps in this age of constant change, the unchanging nature of the message of Christmas is what we need to hear more about.

As we know every age has its challenges and our age is no exception.

We live in an era when advances in technology constantly change things in our everyday life.

There is even a language that communicates the technological experience of change.

There are updates, downloads, apps, and we can do most things “on line.”

The right app allows us into the different areas in the cyber world.

Now most of these changes have been embraced, in some way at least, by many of us. There are many positives here.

Can we imagine life without a mobile phone, a personal computer, Facebook or twitter?

We are constantly, however, encouraged to update, to keep up with the changes - get the newest technology – and being left behind is not an option that many of us would choose.

Yet in the world of technology in some areas, much of our future is being decided for us, for it is one in which artificial intelligence is finding rapid success.

For instance there is now such a thing as an IDA, an intelligent digital assistant.

These assistants can make decisions for us.

Embedded in some of the most widely used devices and internet services, they are designed to respond to ordinary language, anticipate what users are likely to need or take on basic tasks.

It is only a matter of time, 15 years in fact according to computer engineers, before *artificial emotional relationships* between computers and their human users will be part of life for many.

The message at Christmas therefore, that God is among us brings us into reality.

It's a message that we can rely upon, that we can trust in and depend upon. It never changes.

Christianity is not a religion of technology nor is it one of the book (as is often said), but of a person, the living person of Jesus who calls all to become part of the ongoing embodying of his life in each generation and in every place.

There is no app for this. There is no download. There is no IDA. There is no artificial emotional relationship on offer.

There is only faith centred around the living and crucified Lord who comes to us in word and in sacrament and also in the living reality of the poor, the imprisoned, the hungry, the naked, the broken hearted and the lost in ourselves and in others.

The Christmas message simply says, God came among us as one of us, in Jesus.

This message is fleshed out in Jesus' life among us.

From the crib to the cross we learn from him what it is to be fully human the way God has created us.

Jesus shows us how to love God, ourselves and each other by engaging with us personally.

He continues to show us the way, even and especially in this very smart technological age, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ironically Jesus' first call to us was to change, to turn around - to repent so that we could receive the forgiving love of God. But we are not left behind when we can't grasp the finer workings of our deep truths, we are not left to our own devices when we think we can't cope with the change.

We are accompanied, nurtured, loved, understood and gently led through our encounter with him.

In him we are brought into the dignity of being fully human.

There is nothing artificial about it.

Our world is full of change as we have heard, yet with Jesus birth at Christmas there is a sameness that never changes.

What we celebrate today is the reality that love, genuine love, God's love_has come among us in flesh and blood to bring us home to God, ourselves, and each other in the here and now and into eternity.

Merry, happy and holy Christmas.

The Lord be with you.

