

Dear Friends

The Christmas story, as we tell it today, is filled with additions that you won't find in the Bible.

- There is no mention of a stable.
- The "inn" or "lodging" that is mentioned in today's reading (Luke 2: 1-20) was probably a guest room in a family home.
- Joseph's family was from Bethlehem, so he could probably have sought a place to stay with a family member.
- But, the guest room was already being used, so Mary and Joseph were likely housed in the ground floor courtyard where the domestic animals were kept.
- Mary probably wasn't alone when she gave birth, but would have had family with her.

So friends, it wasn't comfortable, but Jesus was born into a home where hospitality was extended even when it was hard to fit all the people in!

In the end, this is a very ordinary and natural event. Jesus was born in the way many human children are – in family homes where everyone makes do with what they have.

But, it was the whim of an Emperor who lived miles away and was oblivious to the birth of this child that caused the crowdedness and the need to use a feeding trough as a crib.

So it is with God's Reign. In the ordinary, quiet corners of our world, where the powers-that-be would not care to look, God's Reign is revealed in the love between families and in friends showing hospitality even when it gets uncomfortable. I became so very aware of this over the last month as we as a family tried our best (in the absence of a formal social care system) to love and care for our terminally ill father.

Community members turned up to sit with us, sing hymns for our dad, provide meals and pray with us. Back here in the UK, my colleagues were standing in for me (doing my work), many of you were filling the gap by doing things that were not normally your brief, while others prayed for us as a family. Such ordinary acts of kindness, that made us experience the love of God in a very tangible way.

It was this child, born in obscurity that began the movement of love and justice that outlasted the Roman Empire!

How can you celebrate not just the birth of a baby, but the birth of a whole new order of love and justice this Christmas?

Christmas Day is rightly a day of praise. But, to praise Jesus and then live by the values and priorities of the Caesars of this world is hypocrisy. This Christmas, as you celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, and share hospitality with family and friends, let your entire life be an expression of praise. And then, let this life of praise overflow into every day of the year.

Happy Christmas, my friends.

Your brother in Christ

Romeo