

## **Bennoch church: 23rd December 2018**

*I was thinking*, what would the modern nativity story look like, if the star stopped above Kirkcaldy? Would there be people taking 'selfies' with the child? The Magi rolling up on their Segways! But what about the other side of society? Who are the people who face closed doors today, where for them, the 'inns are always full'. The people who have nowhere to go or nowhere to turn? Their home is the High street. We have seen them there, or temporary B&Bs or sofa surfing.

I was interested by the charity in Hull, who raised money for homeless people to stay in a hotel for two night over Christmas, only for the hotel to change its mind. Why did they do that? We can have a good guess. Fortunately, another hotel chain stepped in to help. On the one hand, these acts of compassion seems insignificant, yet when they spoke to people who were involved last year, for them it made a huge difference. The issue of homelessness didn't go away, but the man organising said, if it prevents just one suicide, it will all have been worth it.

Who are the people, travelling from their homes, always on the move, giving up all they have, to escape violence or just to seek something better for them and their families. They cross the English channel in small boats, risking their lives. We have seen it on the TV, and if we say, they should go through the proper channels, ask yourself, in the same circumstance, what would

you do? Would you stay at home or be part of the crowd who have crossed central America, seeking to enter the USA?

The history of the people of God, was as a nomadic people who were always on the move, who were asked by God, to welcome the stranger the foreigner, the orphan and the widow into their midst. Central to their covenant with God was the idea of hospitality. To wander and to welcome was part of their identity. Today, people of difference, are met with, rejection, hostility and fear. Immigration. Brexit. Do I need to say anymore. There is still, 'No room at the inn'.

Who are the people who hear the cries of modern angels, who tell them what they need, even if they have no money to buy them. I am talking about the power of advertising, telling us what we need to buy to have a good Christmas. There was a program on TV recently about people who were going to a particular credit company, who were offering reduced interest rates. Still seemed very high to me. But these were people who had little choice, if they wanted to buy their children Christmas presents. They could not go to the bank and they didn't want to go to loan sharks. The one thing we must not do in these circumstance, it make moral judgements. The idea was, they would pay off their loans, just in time to take out another one. When you have little choice and the modern angels are singing

loudly at you, what do you do? That is the pressure of poverty. And I have not even mentioned food banks or toys distribution.

As we celebrate Christmas, remember Jesus early life was one of homelessness, and due to fear of king Herod, a direct threat to their lives, as a child he lived as a refugee in Egypt. Today, many children make that same journey.

When we listen to the Christmas story, what do we hear? The gentle tune of, 'Away in a manger' or strong echoes of the reality of people's lives today. To be true to the story, we need to be true to its reality. Let's not make Christmas too easy, because for many, it is the toughest time of the year. And that makes the words of peace and the promise of hope, all that more powerful. Amen.