4 February 2018: Choral Eucharist
The Second Sunday before Lent
Psalm 104: 26–end, Proverbs 8: 1, 22–31, Colossians 1: 15–20
The Venerable Martin Gorick, Archdeacon of Oxford

‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’

Words are important. This week there was great excitement when a Killer Whale was heard to be speaking English words. Wilkie, a 16 year old captive Orca was heard to say ‘Hello’ and to count ‘1,2,3.’ The sounds were more like sqwarks and whistles to be honest, but they were made through a blowhole, and the intonation was pretty remarkable. It made it onto prime time news anyway, and that is not surprising. Words are important. Through them lovers try to communicate feelings too deep for words, yet words are all they have. Through words politicians try to hammer out agreements, laws, treaties on which millions of lives will depend. Through words of scripture we hear our ancestors in the faith, thousands of years ago, speaking directly to us, people of faith here and now. Through words of scripture we may even hear the voice of God himself. No wonder people got excited at Wilkie the Whale. Words matter.

And ‘In the beginning was the Word.’ Not just any old word, not even a whole bunch of wonderful words, but ‘The Word.’ The one that matters. The one from whom every other word gets its name, of which every other word of worship, wonder and praise is just the palest of pale imitations. In the Beginning was THE Word, and the Word was with God. This Word, at the start of John’s Gospel had been there from the start of all things. This Word simply Was; in the beginning; Was before the dawn of time; simply Was; just as God ‘I am who I am’ simply IS. That old child’s question, ‘If God made all things, who made God?’ Can only be answered by another question, ‘What is greater than God and more evil than the devil, and if you eat it you die? The answer of course, is nothing. Nothing is greater than God or more evil than the devil. If you eat nothing, eventually you will die.

And Nothing made God.
If everything we see and know was to disappear, and there was nothing left, there would still be God. ‘Heaven and earth shall fall away’ we are told, ‘but my words will never fall away’.

In the Beginning was the Word. Pre-existent, if you like.

‘And the Word was with God.’ There is relationship at the heart of what we call God. There always has been.

‘And the Word was God.’ There is no separation between Word and God. ‘All things came into being through him.’ The Word is God reaching out, is the divine longing to share the light and the life that lie in the Father’s heart, the divine energy that scientists discover and marvel at in the heart of all things. ‘Without him not one thing came into being.’ ‘In him was life, and the life was the light of all people.’ Somehow it makes sense of a meaningless world. In the divine light tangled threads reveal themselves to be part of amazing tapestries. And this divine life, bubbling up for all to share has a moral quality. ‘The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.’ Even evil, so manifest and so ugly will never have the last word.

This divine light has been there for everyone, since the dawn of time. Long before Moses, long before Jesus, this light was shining. This divine light brings moments of discovery to academics and to artisans, to artists and to scientists, ‘The true light which enlightens everyone’, and here is our Christian truth, our Christian wonder of the world…. John 1 verse 9:

‘The true light which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.’

So often we miss the point. So often we mess things up. So often we turn away from the light and think we are the source of all things, or someone else is, or some thing is. Or we turn away from the light and prefer to keep things hidden, things that bring us shame and the fear of disgrace. We’re not the only ones to be like this.

‘The true light was in the world, yet the world did not know him. ‘He came to his own,’ with open, bleeding, wounded hands, ‘and his own did not accept him.’ But the door is left ajar… the light still shines in the darkness, for us and for all people, ’For to all who receive him, who believe and trust in his name, he gives power to become children of God.’ To join the divine family. To be part of the cosmic dance, the circle, to enter the point of energy before and beyond all things. To participate in God, to be made his child. ‘Who are born, not of blood, or of the will of man, but of God.’
God is not remote from his creation.

‘The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth.’

This is Jesus Christ. ‘Word of the Father, now in Flesh appearing’ as the great hymn puts it.

And we are called to be a Christlike Church, as our Bishop says.

What might this mean?

As a Christlike Church we will know where we come from. From God. ‘Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.’ In the beginning with God.

‘The Word was with God, and in Him was life and the life was the light of all people.’ We are made to be with God, and through the saving love of Jesus and in the power of the Spirit, that is where we can be. Day by day, year by year, for this life and beyond.

As a Christlike Church we know who we are made to be with. ‘He was in the world’ and we rejoice to be here too. Despite its darkness and pain, its betrayals and lies, it is still a beautiful world. We rejoice to be here. For the Word was made flesh and blood, just as we are. How can we not rejoice in who he has made us? We rejoice too in other people’s insights and discoveries, whether a Christian saint, and Hindu devotee, or an atheist scientist as they seek after truth. For the light which enlightens everyone makes no distinction in all who seek after truth. Like John the Baptist we bear witness to the light, but the light is always bigger than our minds or hearts can hold.

We know where we have come from. We know who we share this life with. And finally, in a Christlike Church, we know where we are going. From God to God.

For in worship, in prayer, in hardship and in joy we have beheld the glory of the Word made flesh. Amidst all the mess of our human life, the divine light shines, full of grace and truth.

From this truth we have come. To this grace and glory we are bound.’

To the one God who has loved us from the beginning, who we learn to know and love in this life, who we pray will welcome us in death.

To that one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be all honour and glory, now and in all eternity. Amen.