24 December 2018: Midnight Choral Eucharist
Christmas Eve
Psalm 98; Isaiah 52: 7–10; Hebrews 1: 1–4; John 1: 1–14
The Venerable Martin Gorick, Archdeacon of Oxford

It’s so good to be with you tonight and thank you all for coming. Amidst all the divisions and chaos and tragedy this is still a beautiful world. Amidst all the human betrayals and failures people are still amazing. As someone said in a Christmas card to me this year, ‘See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.’

They were quoting from 1 John. And we’ve just heard from the Gospel of John. The story of THE Son of God, Jesus Christ. Jesus, whose very name means, God Saves. He is God’s Word to the world. In Jesus we see God. In Jesus we are saved from ourselves, and freed to love others. In Jesus we connect with the life force that lies within and beyond all things. The Logos or Word that was ‘In the Beginning.’

Like the sub-atomic particles that lie within you, me, and the seats you are sitting on. Einstein once lived at Christ Church, and he revealed the mathematics of this, the life force that lies within and beyond all things, uniting all people, all creatures, every planet and star, everything: past, present and future.

Two hundred years before Einstein Charles Wesley lived at Christ Church. He wrote Hark the Herald and a myriad of other hymns. He knew the reality of that same life force, but he knew an amazing secret. That this force was personal. This force was divine and reached out to him with love.

Two thousand years before Einstein, St John wrote his gospel. He didn’t live at Christ Church. In fact, Christ Church wasn’t even a twinkle in St Frideswide’s eye when he wrote ‘In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.’ This is the life force that lies within and beyond all things, uniting all people, all creatures, everything: past, present and future. ‘In him was Life, and that life is the light of all people.’ And here it
becomes personal. It enlightens the engineer, animates the artist and fires the heart of parent and lover. The Word enlightens everyone.

Just for a moment, suspend your disbelief. What if this is true? What difference would it make? Instead of our life having no meaning, we would know our place in the universe. For we share our atoms, our life force with all things, with all people, across all time. And the thing that binds us all together, is not something random, but science so beautiful we’ve hardly begun to understand it. It’s the force within and beyond all things that St John called Logos, Word. God himself. ‘In him was life’, says St John, and that divine life unites us all.

So our life has meaning. All creation, rocks, plants, animals are one in God, for in him we live and move and have our being. We are all one in Christ Jesus, one family in him. If only we could know that, and live that, then all would be well.

But we make such a mess of things. We fight with those we should be at one with. We exploit the earth and pollute its rivers and seas. We turn our face from God and obsess with ourselves.

That’s why the ‘Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us.’ To redeem it. That’s why the Logos entered our frail flesh and blood world with all its misery and mess. Jesus, the Word made flesh would die on the cross, ignored or rejected by many he came to save. He’s still ignored today.

But some heard. Some listened. And some followed.

My mother, Janet, knew Jesus, she knew that God saves. Born in 1930 in Liverpool. The only child of parents who loved her very much. The only problem was, they couldn’t love each other. Her father spent his money on drink and Janet grew up to the sound of her mother being cruelly treated, and shamefully beaten. How could she make sense of a world like this? Every day she walked past a church on her way to school. One day she walked in through the door, and into the kindness of Christian people and the wonder of Christian worship and she began to discover a God whose love was without limit, a God who was real and who loved her forever. She began to find meaning and purpose beyond her home with its terrible mix of love and pain.
My Mum died last year on this night, Christmas Eve, just as the bells were ringing out for Midnight Mass. So sad for us, but not a tragedy. She was 87, had lived a good life and was one of the first women ordained in the Church of England. Many found God’s love through her: God within and beyond all things, the Word made flesh, still found in the midst of our mess and mistakes.

God is as he is in Jesus, therefore we have hope. And the last word I heard my mother say on earth, was ‘Jesus.’

I pray tonight that you find afresh the God who saves, the Word made flesh, the one who loves you his child, and all creation, forever.

Amen.