

How do you communicate a great truth? How do you evoke something of uttermost profundity when words themselves seem inadequate to the task? If you are Michelangelo Buonarotti then you would sculpture a majestic figure; if Raphaello then you would paint exquisitely; a Beethoven would score a symphony; a Zephirelli would make a film. All would hope that in some way they will have transmitted a sense, evoked a feeling within the audience that they were in touch with the sublime; that the Truth was before them.

When Matthew and Luke wanted to tell the world that God had come among his people in the man Jesus of Nazareth; that the world was now a different place since Jesus had been born, lived among us, suffered and died; that when this person spoke, God's voice was heard, when he reached out to the sick, and put his hands on the blind and the lame, it was God's healing touch, they chose to tell this Truth through a narrative, by telling a story.

What actually happened at the end of Herod's reign in Bethlehem was largely unknown to them. But they knew that a child was born who was rightly called 'Son of God'. They knew it happened in Bethlehem because the baby was the Messiah, the Christ; and so must be of the house of David, a child of Bethlehem. They knew his mother was Mary and his father Joseph (so it was thought). They knew Jesus encompassed all that had gone before in the history of his people and fulfilled the prophecies of old; and they knew he was to die. And so they tell their stories to explain who this child was; and what his fate would be. Brilliantly each looks back to see what has been fulfilled and each looks forward to show what must come to pass.

The fourth evangelist takes a different approach to expressing this great Truth. He uses the medium of poetry. The image of the fourth evangelist is an eagle. It is the great poem of the Prologue to his Gospel, the soaring tone which sweeps from the imagined time before the beginning of creation, through the wonderment of the presence of God among us to the promise of a future full of grace and truth which more than anything else gives this Gospel its majestic, winged emblem. These words were soon recognised to have an intensity of holiness that set them apart even from the hallowed words of the Gospel itself. They were used as a blessing. Indeed for centuries the Roman Rite of the Mass concluded with the reading of 'the Last Gospel' – John's Prologue, so that people were sent forth to proclaim the Gospel in their lives with these sacred words ringing in their hearts and minds.

When we read poetry we expect to hear echoes of other works, allusions to other events. The opening words of the hymn take us back to the beginning of the Bible and the opening words of the Book of Genesis. God created all things, bringing order

to chaos by the power of his word. God spoke: “Let there be light”; and God's word is event. God's Word happens. There was light.

The Word that was with God, the Word that is God, the creating Word is now part of creation; and that Word is Light, a Light to enlighten all peoples.

In the Creation story that opens the Bible, the summit of the creative process is humanity – man and woman who are made in the image and likeness of God. And God saw it was “very good”. Now human kind reaches a new fulfilment when the Word becomes human. God comes in the image of man. God comes to make humanity divine.

The story of the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis is catalogue of sin. Humans become alienated from God; from one another, from the world, and alienated from self. Human hearts are divided; sin is ingrained in humanity's very being; distorting, disfiguring, destroying.

God comes into the world and assumes our sinful flesh. Alienation continues; the effects of sin are in the warp and woof of the human condition; and so although the Word is in the world, the world does not know him; his own people did not accept him. Yet the Word is heard by some who do accept him and to them is giving the power to become children of God; to become what mankind was always intended to be: in the image and likeness of God – God's holy people.

With the coming of the Word made flesh, the disfigurement of sin can be banished, if we accept the Word into our hearts; if we open our eyes to the Light.

When standing before a work of genius, a sculpture by Michelangelo, a painting by Raphael; when listening to a Beethoven symphony or engaged by a great piece of cinema by Zephirelli the only suitable response is silence; awe and wonder. Before the Christmas story whether told as a story by Matthew or Luke or as an epic poem by John, the appropriate response is to be silent; in stillness to worship.