

When Matthew tells the story of Jesus' birth he tells a story of a male boy threatened by a wicked king who is saved from a cruel death by the quick and inspired actions of a parent. No one among Matthew's audience would miss the point that in this tale the story of Moses' infancy is being retold.

Pharaoh, name never specified throughout the Book of Exodus, is fearful that the Hebrews are becoming so numerous they might be a threat to his kingdom and so he acts 'shrewdly' and plans to kill off all the new born boys at birth. When this fails through the courage of two midwives – who are named, a sign that they are of much greater importance than the mighty ruler, he orders all the new-born males to be thrown into the Nile. Thus the source of Egypt's life becomes a place of death. Later in a tributary of the Nile, another Pharaoh's horses and riders will be drowned. There is dramatic irony for you. Moses' mother had followed Pharaoh's command and placed her son in the Nile, first having placed him in an ark – the same word for Noah's boat which gave his family safety from the teeming waters. Moses is saved, as Jesus will later be saved.

Matthew shows that Jesus resembles mighty figures from Israel's past but surpasses them. He is a new Moses, but greater than Moses; a new Elijah, but greater than the fiery prophet; a new Jeremiah but greater than that tortured speaker of truth to power. So great is this Jesus that the only description that does him justice is 'Son of God' He is Emmanuel – God -with-us.

The Moses-typology is clear in today's Gospel-passage. Jesus begins the first of five great discourses in this Gospel, a number which may echo the five Books of Moses which open the Hebrew Bible; five books which are called Torah, or instruction.

Central to those Books of Law are the Ten Words, or the Ten Commandments, which God gives to Moses to give to the people. On the Mountain, amid thunder and fire God speaks.

Jesus speaks his new teaching on a mountain. And he opens his sermon with the Beatitudes; a summary of how he lives his life and how he expects his followers to live. They have a similar function to the Ten Words of Moses' Law; they are concise yet comprehensive. They summarise the main points of Jesus' teaching as the Ten Words encapsulate the rules of Moses. Both are filled out in the verses to follow. Yet unlike the Commandments the Beatitudes are entirely positive.

The Law given at Sinai laid down how society was to function through respect for God and acceptance of the rights of others. It was not the powerful who would have

control of anything by force of might. Basic rights were to be recognised and infringements punished. The format however is prohibition. “Do not” is the command.

The Beatitudes are calls to action not avoidance. The ten commandments can be obeyed by doing nothing, by utter passivity. The state of blessedness has to be worked for. No one can be a peacemaker unless they expend great energy. Whereas Luke thinks that being poor is a to be blessed, Matthew has Jesus speak of the need to be poor in spirit and that requires work. To be pure in heart is to work to overcome fallen human inclinations. Even to mourn is to be active in this society where everything was done in public and mourning involved rituals which had to be performed.

The commandments are like rules for children who need to be told “Don't, don't, don't”. The Beatitudes are for a mature people who make choices and accept responsibilities.

The Commandments were given by God so that the people could live in the Land God promised to Abraham and be secure. The Beatitudes are given by Jesus so that we can share in the Kingdom.

The Beatitudes are a call for active discipleship, not passive inertia. Bishop's Ralph's challenge for us to be a community of missionary outreach and liturgical excellence is an invitation to active discipleship. This was the theme of the parish meeting we had last Thursday.

Nearly forty people attended on the coldness night of the winter. That represents many but by no means all of those who have an active role in the parish. The atmosphere was wholly positive and forward looking. A report on the meeting and the survey is available on the website.

We looked forward with a recognition that the values of the world are against us, and regaining young peoples attention is an immense but vital challenge, but with enthusiasm. What we have attempted so far – the day with the Lord, soon to be repeated, and the Advent Festival, were by any measure successful, and drew people here.

How do we build on this? Then way forward will be sketched in the weeks to come. There will be another Day with the Lord in Lent. And in Lent we will begin the slow but definite movement of reopening the Church beyond the times of services. We have here in this building a wonderful resource for evangelization – bringing people to an awareness of the numinous, the something-beyond-what we-know-and-can-grasp. We have a place here of atmosphere, hallowed by decades of prayers, with

glorious art in windows, icons and pictures to help lift the heart and mind to God – a fine definition of prayer. It is here, but so many folk of Rotherham do not know we are here, have never been in the place, do not identify “St Bede's”. A visitor from London this week was enraptured by the organ that he came to play, and bowled over by finding such treasures in Rotherham!

The issue is that we are away from the centre with no people passing, no thoroughfare. We therefore need people to be here when the church is open to keep an eye open. In Lent we will, with your cooperation have Exposition, as we had today before Mass, after Mass up to 12.o'clock. If this works we will continue and extend the opening time. On Wednesday evening the church will be open and Compline will be celebrated. I cannot be here on Wednesdays as I talk around the diocese, so it will be led by members of the parish-congregation.

These are small beginnings of a greater development. But it needs more than the willing forty to make it happen. We all have a part to play in the living of the Beatitudes. It will vary according to our circumstances, of course. We all have varied commitments. But the greatest happiness, research tells us, dare we say the greatness blessedness, comes from giving of ourselves to others. That is how we become what we are called to be – images of God, the Blessed children of God.