

Tonight we remember with joy and exultation a child born to us.

What would the world be like if there were no children born? If fertility ended for human kind? This is the premise of two fine novels: *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (1987) and *Children of Men* by PD James (1992). If child bearing ceased, there would no doubt be a rush of scientific enquiry to find out why such a thing had happened and to find a way of reversing the state of affairs. In the meantime while scientists scurried to find an answer, the world would change dramatically and fearfully.

Crèche's would disappear, having no little clientèle, and schools would inevitably follow; teacher's would be made redundant and have to re-train, but for what? The population would diminish. The old would have fewer people to care for them even than now. There would be an increasing sense of desolate hopelessness. People would treasure memorabilia that reminded them of children's games, and children's laughter. There would be an increasing misery amid a growing realisation of impending doom.

Both novels foresee a chilling future. Atwood has some women able to breed and they, the handmaids, are imprisoned by the rich for their use as society breaks down. James envisages male infertility as the cause. Violence abounds and the elderly are disposed of far out to sea in what is euphemistically called a *quietus*, as there is no means of, and no desire to look after them. In the two books there is a break down of everything. The basics which make society function fall apart. Children are the glue that holds so much together. Imagine your world with children removed from it.

A world without children is a world without hope. Without children there is no future.

Tonight we celebrate the birth of a child. Every baby's birth conveys a sense of the miraculous. Every tiny infant is a wonder. This child was even more an act of God than most births. For this is God's definitive 'yes' to the creation God made by his Word and continues to sustain by his loving care.

The Hebrew Scriptures narrate god's involvement with the people he lovingly created in God's own 'image and likeness'. God created human kind to be his dialogue partners; his appointees to manage and care for the world God had lovingly made. Those sacred writings tell a story of infidelity and betrayal on the part of God's people, who turn away from him again and again. God remains faithful to the promises he has made; and God renews and expands on God's promises. The zenith

of God's faithfulness is the giving of his Son to humanity. This is God's definitive and irrevocable 'yes' to God's people. He becomes one with us.

God entrusts God's son into human hands as a human being. A baby is fragile, dependent, needy, helpless; all that God is not, as the philosophers describe 'God'. But this is how our God comes to us; this is how our God becomes 'our God'; as a dependent, needy baby. Babies, children carry the hopes of the world. With no children, living would be hope-less. This baby is the Hope of the world. And that hope will not fail. God's abiding faithfulness is our guarantee.

A blessed, God-centred Christmas to you all.