

One this day the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Christ, the Universal King, hence at the beginning of our Parish Eucharist we would have sung 'Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour' to the great Welsh hymn tune Bryn Calfaria; what a wonderful way to begin our worship of Almighty God, picturing the heavenly throne of grace on which sit the Father with his only begotten Son on his right hand, with the Holy Spirit proceeding from both. The hymn continues with the rich and vivid imagery of the adoring angels who worship the Paschal Lamb, of the Manna come down from heaven to feed the people of God, and blood and water streaming from His stricken side to forever quench our thirst. Indeed we should sing Alleluia and loudly for all that God has done for us. So, as we worship and see the heavenly realms envisioned in that great hymn of praise, it seems appropriate to ask a question of us all: do we actually believe in the Christian Faith of which we sing?

This is not a trick question nor is it me simply being provocative. According to an article that I read in the newspaper as many as 35% of practicing Christians do not believe in the virginal conception of Jesus, nor the virgin birth of Jesus,

nor the resurrection. Further a similar number do not believe in the Trinity, that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This article concluded that many Christians simply happen to go along to Church and are really not that bothered about theology or doctrine. Hence my question, do we actually believe in the Christian Faith of which we sing?

I reckon that the answer to that question is a quite resounding, Yes: Yes, I do believe in the Christian Faith as set out in the Catholic Creeds of the Church, one of which is always recited at the Parish Eucharist. Yes, I do believe in the virginal conception of Jesus who is the second person of the Holy Trinity, God the Son, and I do believe in the virgin birth of Jesus and in His resurrection. Which can only be applauded. Thus if we believe as a matter of faith what is contained in the creeds, which is a summary of our collective faith, then we can with conviction sing another great hymn, the Magnificat, Our Lady Mary's song of joy, because contained within those words, those scripturally based words is the essence of our Christian faith.

I have preached before of the Annunciation, which we have depicted in a glorious medieval

alabaster carving on the south wall of St. Martin's. And I continue to meditate upon this beginning on earth of our redemption which is completed in heaven. The details are worth repeating. Mary was a 14yr old girl, no older than that, a 14yr old girl whom God Most High asked to answer yes to the Archangel Gabriel's declaration of her vocation, that is her gift of ministry from God. Even though she and she alone had been prepared from the beginning of time to be, as the 3rd Ecumenical Council of the undivided Church held at Ephesus in 431 declared, Theotokos, a Greek word that means 'God-bearer' or 'Birth-giver to God', Mary still had to answer Yes, and she did. And so the Son of God, through whom all things are made, began to be made in flesh inside the womb of this girl, so that in due time He might be born like us in all things, except sin, as the writer to the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us. Like us in all things, except sin. Without the Incarnation, without God becoming man in the womb of Mary our belief is useless, our faith is nothing. As loyal Anglicans we are required to accept as an article of faith and salvation the declarations of the Ecumenical Councils of the undivided Church, east and west, including therefore the declaration that Mary is

Theotokos. Belief in the Annunciation followed by Mary's journey to her kinswoman Elizabeth, followed by the normal weeks of gestation, like us in all things except sin, followed by the birth at Bethlehem, like us in all things except sin, is Christian Faith and belief. In Jesus God is made man of the flesh of Mary. And the rest, as we might say, is history; the history of our redemption at the will of God Most High.

At the end of our Parish Eucharist on a Sunday morning in normal times, the Parish Eucharist in which the God who took flesh in the body of Mary comes to us to feed us in incarnate forms of bread and wine, we sing the praises of the Church to God Most High for that Incarnation in the words of the Angelus. Recall those words if you would and see how this hymn of praise is a retelling of the events of the Annunciation and Incarnation. All can be found in Scripture in the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke and the first chapter of the Gospel of St. John. The 'Hail Mary' which we sing three times is a combination of words from the Gospel of St. Luke and a prayer of supplication asking that Our Lady Mary may support us as a mother supports her child in his/her sinfulness. I know my mother prayed for

me on earth and continues to pray in heaven for her sinful son, whom she loves. Our Lady Mary, as the mother of Jesus into whom all Christians are baptised, becomes the mother of the brothers and sisters of Jesus, that is you and me, and she will surely do likewise. The Angelus is then finished by the collect for the Feast of the Annunciation in words taken directly from the Book of Common Prayer.

There are those who will tell you that only Roman Catholics sing the Angelus; they could not be more wrong. It is all Christians who sing the Angelus; those who believe in the Incarnation, the birth in flesh of our God. To sing the Angelus is, in a sense, to sing the Nicene Creed which we do in every Parish Eucharist, for all we are doing is giving glory to God that in Jesus we have one who is like us in all things except sin, and we give due acknowledgement of the ministry and love of Mary who said, Yes. The Angelus is no badge of allegiance to this or that church party, nor does it belong to this or that Christian denomination. Rather, it is the badge of All Christians who believe in the words that they recite in the Nicene Creed.

Some more words from another great hymn of faith:

‘Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word: Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure. Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord To children's children and for evermore.’

As I stand in normal times before our image of the Virgin Mary and intone the first versicle of the Angelus and as you respond we are together telling out the greatness of the Lord to children's children and for evermore for we are singing of the greatest of the gifts of God to us all, that is His Son and we are honouring Mary, that out of her love for God she was able to say Yes. The only badge of allegiance that we are pinning to our chest is the badge that says, Yes, I am a Christian; Yes, I do believe; Yes, Jesus is indeed my Lord and my God, ‘Risen, ascended, glorified!’ whom today I honour as my Universal King and to whom with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit be all honour and praise on earth as it is in heaven to all ages unending.

Amen.