



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for the Mass of the Nativity (24th December) 2025

Had you visited that beating heart of the Parish Church, which is the Vicarage study a few months ago, you would have noticed a dismantled clock sitting at the end of a table. The clock was in need of cleaning, so I took it to pieces, gave it a bath and cleaned out the old oil; then the work ground to a halt. The reasons for this were various, but might have included the Vicar's developed capacity for distraction: I suspect that had my late aunt been visiting for Christmas this year, the work would have been completed by the New Year.

Part of the problem, of course, is that I have got used to seeing the clock in its present state and its *déshabillé*, so to speak, has become so familiar that it has become part of the settled landscape of the room, removing any sense of urgency to complete the task.

I suspect that something similar pervades our engagement with the woes, which scar our world: wars, chronic inequities of resources and influence or the increase in the aggression with which we routinely engage with one another, together with all the symptoms of these phenomena. If we stop to think about them we recognise that something is seriously amiss, but for the most part their familiarity eases their affront and we learn to work around them - if not simply ignore them - rather than confront them.

Yet, at Christmas, with its narrative of the Nativity of Christ, we are reminded of the Christian perspective that not only does the world not have to be as it is, but that it should not be. In the Birth of Christ, God's Word of mutual concern and peaceful coexistence is not only spoken, but embodied in the Person of the Christ-Child, Who would grow up to be a living Monument to these divine truths - even to the point of sacrificing Himself so that His proclamation of them should not die.

That Sacrifice is an indication of the price that sometimes must be paid to retrieve the more Godly world, for the which we claim to yearn. In working around the scars of fallen humanity, we forge alternative paths if not to flourishing then to survival - and more often than not something somewhere between the two. The discomfit of abandoning these paths once they have been established can lead us to prefer acquiescence in what we have, rather than work for the world as God would have it be. We tell ourselves that, regrettable as it may be, this is just how the world is.

Yet, such a perspective represents a failure of Faith, suggesting that God's manifesto for the world is unrealistic and unattainable: so, we make our own way through the life of this world, quietly setting aside the counsels of peace along with the habits and routines, which would respond to them.

Fractiousness and conflict are not inevitable or intrinsic features of human society. In fact, they constitute an aberration of God's creation: a triumph, albeit fleeting, for the baser aspects of human character and the deception that we are incapable of living in peace.

Tonight, we shall gaze on God's refutation of the proposition that the world as we see it is all that it can be. He shines a light of hope into the darkness of human misery and invites us to grasp its opportunities, setting our sights on a world which, like the Christ-Child, embodies the divine Word of Peace. The celebration of Christmas stands as a focus of the Christian conviction that Peace can prevail, that it should prevail, that it will prevail; and the Christ-Child invites us to participate in the process