

## Woodstock Carol Service, 22.12.19

Christmas can be a special time of the year, but also sometimes a difficult one because so often it is bound up in memories. I'm lucky in that my memories of Christmas are good ones.

I remember my Gran always used to come to spend Christmas with us. She had been a primary school teacher, specialising in music. And one of the things which has strangely stuck in my mind about her at Christmas time was the *Cowboy Carol*, which she must have sung with her school choir, and in particular a phrase in that song: "there'll be a new world beginning from tonight".

Ten days ago I suspect quite a few people had thoughts along the lines of "there'll be a new world beginning from tonight". When that exit poll came out, and the results started coming in, and it became clear that the Tories had won a big majority, things began to feel different. The political situation in our country began to feel different. Things will happen in different ways.

But whether you think that Tory government is a good thing or not, whether you think Boris Johnson is trustworthy or not, whether you think Brexit is a good thing or not, whether you think the prospect of Scottish independence is a good thing or not, things feel different now. Whether you think Robert Courts continuing as MP here is a good thing or not, whether you think the quick fall of Jo Swinson or the slow fall of Jeremy Corbyn is a good thing or not, there's a new world beginning.

How we find our place as a church in this new world is an important question, and one we will need to keep thinking about in the months to come. Because if the birth of Jesus really did mean a new world beginning from tonight, then being followers of Jesus should make a difference to the world we find ourselves in.

Mary had a shocking visit from the angel which turned her whole world upside down. It had an impact in her very body, but she was clear-sighted enough to understand that it would turn the whole world upside down, and not just *her* world. The rich and powerful would be knocked of their perches and the people with nothing would be lifted up.

If Jesus comes, it has an impact far beyond just us. It's not just something which gives us a nice warm feeling on the dark and cold nights. It's that, but it's more than that. It's a new world beginning.

Our world is a glorious place, a wonderful place, but it is also in a bit of a mess. Maybe that's the world outside. Maybe that's the world inside. But Christ comes with nothing more than the animals' feeding trough. That, and love.

In amongst all the uncertainty and the mess, Christ comes to start a new world, to make a heaven of our manger. This Christmas, let's look to that new world and play our part in God's big idea: to find the mangers and transform them into heaven.