



from Garth...



The little town of Bethlehem, photo taken two or three years ago

The Christ of Christmas

Come Lord Jesus

For the Advent Sunday weekend I did a concert and service at St Mary's Church in Moseley, Birmingham. The weekend was called "Bethlehem is Calling", and simply doing the events was inspirational for me. As the first Advent candle was lit and the vicar, Duncan Strathie, interviewed me in the service about the Advent message, I found myself going back to those few words that I think lie at the heart of the Advent journey, which is, "Come Lord Jesus" - and "come to the wounded situations of our world."

As we look around the world, this is a very difficult time with its violence and wars, a huge scale rejection of refugees, and in our own communities we have a divided society. Into these situations we want to be praying, and where we can doing deeds that reflect the encounter with the Prince of Peace. "Bethlehem is Calling" I think has such an important message that has a relevance to all that is happening.

*Here it comes from Bethlehem
Bow down low, start again
As a humble generous God
Stops to show us the way of love, from Bethlehem*

God's identification with the vulnerable, with the oppressed, with the refugees is part of the Christmas story, and that's all part of what Bethlehem says to us today.

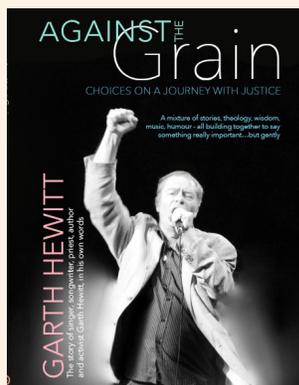
Christ in Italy

I read in the paper the other day a story that seemed to capture the heart of the message of the Christ of Christmas. It was about the church in Italy.

The new right-wing government is expelling people from migrant reception centres and their actions threaten to make thousands homeless. But the Catholic Church has spoken up and said, "You don't leave migrants in the street... a profound sense of solidarity must prevail."

When a letter was sent announcing the expulsion of people from the reception centre in Mineo, Sicily, the local Bishop, Monsignor Peri, said he could provide beds in local facilities, and then "And if there are not enough beds? ... **We will open the church doors of every single parish under our control...** it's a matter of protecting individuals. Imagine this, in Italy now it is a crime to abandon dogs, but it is not a crime to abandon people... abandoning men, women and children is now the law."

This is making visible the Christ of Christmas – the church is living out the words of Jesus about the kingdom or community of God. It is Church versus State, it is the kingdom of God versus the empire.



US Distributer for **Against the Grain**

Good news over the book *Against the Grain*. A Christian bookstore in the States called **Hearts and Minds Bookstore in Dallastown Pennsylvania** has taken a stock of the book so that people in the States can get it from them without the hideous postage price it is otherwise.

So to our American friends, do pass the word around that people can get *Against the Grain* now from **Hearts and Minds, and our thanks to Byron and Beth Berger for making this possible for us.**



Bethlehem from Manger Square - photo by Tony Neeves

Is it a real place?

In our services this year let's try to say something about the condition of the little town of Bethlehem, particularly when we sing the carol 'O little town of Bethlehem' - it is now an even smaller town, with 87% of its land taken by the occupying power.

In the hairdresser just before we went to Bethlehem Gill was talking about going there, and one of the hairdressers said, "Is it a real place?" I think many people think like that and it is important to somehow bring home to people, Bethlehem is a real place, it's a suffering place, **but it contains the message which is needed for our bewildered world.**

We've made our **Bethlehem is Calling** meditational video available on YouTube for this Christmas season, you can find it [here](#).

Jesus was born under Occupation

It is a remarkable parallel that Bethlehem was occupied in the time of Jesus and Bethlehem is occupied now. Occupation is arbitrary and brutal, and just a little way

from Bethlehem the occupying army came into Ramallah recently. Dr Hanan Ashrawi, distinguished Palestinian leader, peace negotiator and legislator, and also a Christian, spoke these words to reflect this recent incursion of the Israeli army: "For the past two days Israeli occupation soldiers have terrorised our neighbourhood in Ramallah, raiding the official news agency, stores and offices and firing tear gas and bullets. **This is what occupation is, a state of unchecked violence and a reality of perpetual insecurity.**"

So let's keep today's community who are living under occupation in our prayers and thoughts this Christmas.

Message from Gaza

Just as we were finishing this newsletter and getting it ready to send out to you, I had this message from Constantine Dabbagh in Gaza, a long time friend I have known for many years. It's a very beautiful and moving message which I want to share with you.

Dear Brother Garth,

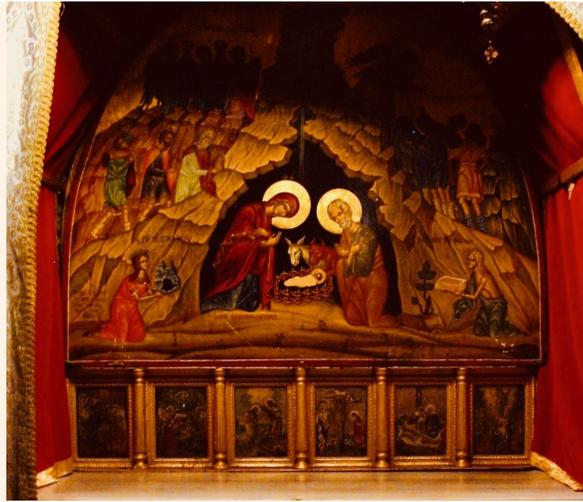
I seize the opportunity of the Advent season to wish you and yours a Merry Christmas and a blessed, happy and peaceful new year.

Please keep us in your prayers and we do appreciate your continued support to end the occupation - in order to end our captivity and agony - and to enable the Palestinians to achieve a Just Peace and self-determination, as they have been **created in the image of God as well**, and are struggling for their being and existence in their homeland.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth Peace, Good Will to All People"

*Constantine Dabbagh
Gaza-December 2018*

Prayer for Christmas Eve



Within the Church of the Nativity, the altar above the place of Jesus' birth

**You are the God with such a precious love for humanity –
So we must cherish human rights
You are the God of humility –
made visible in the ordinary person
In the everyday ordinariness of life
You are the God of the forgotten and insignificant –
and therefore there is hope for all and we too are shown how to live**

**And you are the God of Bethlehem today –
You would chose it again precisely because
the world thinks it is insignificant and its people are of no value
So the angels would sing again to say 'here God is at home'
and the wise would be surprised again saying – 'here God is at home'
and shepherds, and carpenters making olive wood gifts,
and tour guides with no work, and drivers of coaches for pilgrims,
and innkeepers and all the community – women, children and men –
crushed, humiliated, invaded and imprisoned
can stand up tall with confidence and proclaim 'here God is at home'.
Because you have shown your character in Bethlehem –
You affirmed humanity in Bethlehem . . . and still do today
And that is the message of Christmas eve.**

Making Holy Dreams Come True, p 42

And these values remind us of the miracle of Christmas, that the values of the Prince of Peace give us hope in the way that we live. We have the challenge to be the community that makes this hope visible.



Wishing you a very Happy Christmas

©2019 Garth Hewitt Foundation | 186 Hykeham Road, Lincoln, LN6 8AP

[Web Version](#)

[Preferences](#)

[Forward](#)

[Unsubscribe](#)

Powered by [Mad Mimi](#)®
A GoDaddy® company