

Carol Service Sermon Jesus College 1 December 2013

In nomine...

A Christmas sermon at the end of a term of sermons on relationships. There are of course many places where I could start. How God is both Father and Son? How Jesus is both fully human and truly divine? The Virgin mother – How? Why allow all those other children to die? What's so special about the baby who is the Christ child?

So many things I could preach about. But, you know, I'm going to preach on – the Tardis.

After all I know there are a number of keen Dr Who fans out there. And indeed in here. There are indeed quite a few of us in here. Oxford colleges I sometimes think are like the Tardis. Not because of the number of Doctors with extraordinary powers within our walls. Or because students are particularly good at dressing up. Or because we are so often stage sets for dramas (by which I mean films). No. Oxford colleges are like the Tardis because from outside you can't believe how much space there is inside. How can all this be fitted in? Jesus College is a very good space manager. We're much more economically set out than say Magdalen or Worcester with their cheekily massive grounds.

Jesus the Space Manager. Because in the Child Jesus, heaven and earth are contained in just one newborn. And if you've ever seen a newborn, you'll know quite how tiny they are. Astonishing that anyone should even try to preach that in just that little space are all of heaven and earth. But that's what the

Gospel says. “He was in the world, and the world was made by him”. And to top and tail the reading, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”

Words, communication, are central to relationships. We relate to one another – and we relate stories. Relating is both about kinship and communication. Communication builds and grows relationship. Miscommunication threatens it. And you students are all here at Jesus to learn about your subjects, and how to communicate your subjects. You relate to one another, and you relate your stories, your identity, your interests, your work, to each other.

Just so did God want to relate himself, what he does, who he is, to humanity. So he did it in human form. So in this divine newborn is the hope of God relating to the world. And in this divine newborn, are contained all the relationships in the world. Because God is Love. God is relationship. In the Beginning was Relating. And Relating was made flesh, and dwelt among us.

We are all in it together. And the good news of Christmas is that that means God as well. “He came unto his own”. God in Jesus was in the same boat. Imagine Jesus rowing with us in the Christchurch regatta. At Christmas the timeless one, the eternal one, was doing things for the first time. So God in Jesus would have been eligible to row as a Novice Fresher in M1 or M2 at Christchurch. God in Jesus wanted to be a crew member, part of our boat, rowing for us, sweating with us, shouting with us, exerting himself with us. Being in the same boat. Being with us, doing it all with us. And building relationship with us.

God in Jesus knew what it was to be human. To be helpless. Vulnerable. A dependent child. Into this Christ-Child the Almighty God emptied himself: the Word became an infant, one unable to speak, one who learnt anew how to communicate, learnt afresh how to relate. God in Jesus knew what it was to build relationships from scratch, to be at the Freshers' bop, to meet new peers doing the same subject or living in the same staircase. God in Jesus came close.

God in Jesus took up space in the whole universe, yet the very essence of heaven and earth was within this tiny infant. He learnt what it was to have a mother, a father, ancestors, a community. And he showed us how to be in community, how to let relationship lie at our heart.

The good news of Christmas is this: The Eternal God, to be close to us, took on the limits of human flesh. The Almighty God, to be close to us, took on the tininess of a newborn. The Creator, to be close to us, took on creaturely humanity. Life Divine, to be close to us, took on the weakness of human life. Divine Relationship, to be close to us, to relate to us, became a human being.

I may not be a massive "Whovian" myself, but I have learnt that Time Lords normally have two hearts. Yet the Lord of Heaven and Earth, Jesus the Space Manager, the great Lord who is... but a tiny *baby* in Jesus at Christmas, teaches us how to make the very most of the one heart that each of us has. Our own hearts may be physically little. But, filled by Christ, they can be emotionally, spiritually, Tardis-like: Open your hearts to Relationship, to God, and you will be amazed at just how big your hearts are.