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Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ

May Grace and Peace carry each of us through this new year of 2025.

New year; new beginnings. This is the first of what I hope is a monthly pastoral letter. Hoping this is an opportunity to share news, stories and to encourage one another in this miraculous journey of life and faith we are each embarked upon.

If you have any news, stories, or just want to pull me up about something, please do be in touch. My email address is g.gresswell@yahoo.co.uk by way the easiest way to be in contact.

Matthew 2:13-18 is our beginning point.

Gaza; Syria; Yemen; places familiar to any who read the Bible or just watch the news. This news is usually bleak and violent. Just like the story Matthew presents with 'the slaughter of the innocents.' Why is this included in God's good book?

Herod was an extremely complex person. Racially he was an Arab; Religiously Jewish. His grandfather, Antipater the elder, was appointed governor of Judea. This made Herod 'a Jew' whilst culturally he was Greek and was seeking to turn Jerusalem into a Greek City. Politically, he was Roman. He married ten times, became increasingly paranoid, murdering his 'favourite' wife, Mariamme, most of his children, and in later life suffered all sorts of painful maladies. Herod was a complex man. His default position, like Assad in Syria, was terror and violence.

The time of the first Christmas was a violent age. Matthew presents Jesus as a new Moses. Moses was born in the midst of a 'slaughter of the innocents', and Jesus, like Moses, finds sanctuary in Egypt. However, this is not the only reason this story is presented by Matthew.

I loved the first three Human League albums. All very different plotting their journey from synthesised despair to love songs and political melodies. Forty years ago, they were singing about the warfare in 'The Lebanon.' Nothing much changes, does it?!

How do people retain their faith under such conditions? One answer is that they remember the Christmas story and the cross. A mindless, bloody atrocity took place at the birth of Jesus. After reading this story, the reader is not caught unawares about human inflicted violence and terror. At the beginning and the end of his Gospel, Matthew gives us pictures of the depth of evil Jesus came to redeem.

God, Emmanuel, willingly becomes part of our story, exposing oneself to the vulnerability of us mortals, coming through a 'lowly' maiden, announced by Angels, visited by sages and shepherds, all of which knew of the violence and bloodshed of the days they lived in. If the Gospel can flourish in Palestine/Israel, in the midst of slaughter, it can flourish anywhere.

Why? Because love wins out in the end. Not even death can thwart the purposes of God revealed in Christ Jesus. Forgiveness on the cross and the Resurrection of Jesus enables us to know that God's love overcomes all the evil in the world as human beings seem intent on inflicting, not just on each other, but this beautiful planet God has graced us with.

We are fortunate not to live with such brutality on our doorstep, yet we see this reality at Trinity Safe Space in Runcorn and Widnes. We don't have those deep copper mines of Chile, but we see global temperatures rising as the degradation of the earth continues. The world is a small place.

May we, this coming year, not be afraid to become involved in projects and communities where love wins out; whether ECO Church; Foodbanks; Asylum Seekers; the lonely, the bereaved, the sick and the marginalised. God goes with you in all of these, and other ventures.

Please share your good news stories. Please keep praying for the world and one another. Please get involved in projects where God calls you, and please continue to worship Almighty God, the Father/Mother, Son and Spirit, together, building one-another up in faith and enabling others to be lost in wonder, love and praise.

Gordon

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