

A mother's hard work

Gillian Cooper *reflects on* Luke 2:15-21

The shepherds are still praising God as they return to their fields and their sheep. As they sit in the cold and dark, watching for the wolf, they will for ever hold in their hearts the image of the baby and his mother, and above all of the angels, the singing, the light and the glory.

For Mary, however, the hard work now begins. The birth away from home has been hard. But the physical work of labour is nothing compared with the lifetime of care and anxiety, joy and suffering that lies ahead. First there are religious duties – the circumcision and naming of her son. He cries as he is cut with the knife and Mary feels

his pain, not for the last time. He is given his name, one which carries the promise and threat of a special destiny.

Tomorrow we will be given a sharp reminder of the cost that is paid by mothers and their children for the ambitions and insecurities of those who are in positions of power. Herod orders the slaughter of potential enemies, cruelly and pointlessly, and those who are innocent pay the price.

God's glorious plan has been set in motion, and with the shepherds we sing God's praise, our gratitude sharpened by the knowledge of the cost of our salvation. 🍷



Agarianna76 / Shutterstock.com

We praise you, O God, for the angels' message of glory and peace. As we hold in our hearts the knowledge of your self-giving love, help us to be your people, and to work joyfully for the coming of your kingdom. Amen.

The Church Fathers

Part I – the infant Church

by Richard Gunning

The second century was a turbulent time in the development of Christianity. Despite this, word was spreading. Christian communities sprang up in Rome, Galilee, Samaria, Damascus and Antioch. They were regarded as Jewish sects, although many devout Jews strongly objected to this association. At the same time, Christians were arguing among themselves. The Gnostics rejected

the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, while another sect taught asceticism. Yet another, heretical in the extreme, taught that the Old Testament God was not good enough to be the father of Jesus.

This, then, was the scene into which the early Church Fathers emerged – a vibrant mixture of original thinkers, teachers and prolific writers. Many were unafraid to die martyrs' deaths for their beliefs. Over the next two weeks we will highlight the achievements of some of these influential figures. 🍷

Richard lives in Surrey and preaches at local churches. His passion is the golf course – for freedom, fresh air and inspiration.

Walking with Poppy

Presents

by Gillian Cooper

Poppy is a happy dog. She has had several days of visiting friends and family members, and there have been lots of presents. Of course, all presents are for her, no matter who they are addressed to. Those who know her wrap presents in shreddable tissue paper and hide treats in the folds. After so much excitement and so many treats she is a bit slow on her

walk today, but there is a general sense of contentment about her. When there are presents, she knows she is loved.

Christmas can be busy and stressful. Sometimes we are glad when it's all over. But the few days before the New Year celebrations give us time to pause and to remind ourselves of the costliness of God's plan of salvation. And we are again awed by the magnificence of God's gift to us and know ourselves loved beyond measure. 🍷

“Faith is the highest passion in a human being. Many in every generation may not come that far, but none comes further.”

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Danish philosopher, theologian and poet