

### Our Christmas – Jesus amongst us

Let me tell you about our Christmas tree. Only Juniper Green Parish Church has a tree quite like this! Thanks to Robin for providing the tree for us; he's done it for lots of years now. There are some things on the tree that I want to show you: first of all, there's a card; this card has been sent to us as a congregation and it comes from the playgroup who are using our halls – "to Jim and all the parishioners of Juniper Green Parish Church, thank you for making us so welcome. We hope you have a merry Christmas. Best wishes from everyone at Playgroup"; they have been here since the village hall closed and have sent us this card to say 'thank you'; how good is that! Then I want to show you the decorations on the tree: these were all coloured in by people at Messy Church on December 3<sup>rd</sup>; some by adults, some by children, some are neater than others, but all of them tell us something about Christmas: there's a stable, a camel, a donkey, a sheep, the people, Jesus in the manger; lots of people took time to colour in these decorations and there are more in the vestibule that you can see as you leave. This is our tree and there is no other quite like it! There is another Juniper Green tree in the Hall, thanks to Alison, and we have a certificate for it from the Balerno Christmas tree festival!

This is our tree. This is our Christmas. Our Christmas service today includes all of us in one way or another; it is *our* Christmas service. The choir has been practising hard to sing their music for us today and they are fantastic; Florence has worked hard! The children have told us story by Passing the parcel and getting involved in a game to tell the story of Jesus; not many churches will have played pass the parcel this morning! We've seen "Christmas in a nutshell"! Everyone of us has taken part in singing carols and making a happy noise to praise God. This is our Christmas service and we're glad to celebrate Christmas together today. Every church celebrates Christmas in different ways and this is ours!

Our tree, our Christmas. But there is one thing that everyone has at the heart of their celebration and that is the story of Jesus. Christians everywhere celebrate Christmas in different ways, but we all celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world. Joseph: we read about him. What's your impression of Joseph? He was happy to be engaged to Mary, looking forward to the wedding, but then Mary tells him about her baby and he's not so sure anymore. An angel comes to visit, God's messenger to tell him that the baby will be the Son of God, will be the Saviour of the world; will have this great title Immanuel, "God w/us". Joseph decides to believe the angel, and decides to trust God and he gives the child his name – Jesus! Joseph knew that God was at work; he didn't understand all of it, but he was ready to trust God; God was in control.

Our tree, our Christmas here in Juniper Green; our Saviour. It doesn't matter how we celebrate Christmas, but Jesus is with us. Immanuel means God with us. When we sing, when we tell the story, when we open our cards, when we give presents, God is with us. When we visit family, or our family visits us; when we're on our own – God is with us. The great delight of Christmas is Immanuel – God with us. This baby who was given all these grand titles grew up to become a man who loved people and cared for people; he grew up to be a man who suffered and was bullied and beaten by powerful people; he was a man who died on a cross and a man who was raised by God's power. This Jesus became the Saviour of the world, our Saviour; and our Christmas is all about giving this Jesus room in our hearts and letting Him shape the way we think and believe and live. Will this be our Christmas too? Will it be a time for faith, hope, love?