

## **Christmas 2012: the people who don't count do count**

'At that time a law was passed in Parliament, at the direction of David Cameron, that there should be a nation-wide census. The census was taken when Boris was Mayor of London.

Everyone had to go back to their home town. So Joe journeyed from his home deep in Devon to his birthplace – where his branch of the Davidson's came from – the city of Bristol. He took with him his fiancée, Mary, who was already expecting a baby. When they got to Bristol they found it was packed. All they could find for Mary to give birth to her baby in was a garage - at the back of a pub, south of the river, in Bedminster.

Meanwhile, up in the clear air of Clifton Village, there were taxi drivers gathered in a group within sight of the Suspension Bridge, waiting for pub goers to come out and have a lift home. Suddenly a messenger from God stood there in front of them – brighter than the all the light from the Suspension Bridge. They were terrified and began to babble away in their different native languages – Urdu, Bengali, Romanian and Polish. But the messenger said 'Don't be afraid. See here, I've got great news for you. Today, in Bedminster, God's promised Saviour has arrived. He's the one who will lead you. He's the one you are to follow. You'll find him wrapped in mechanic's overalls, placed in a cut open oil drum, lying in a garage in Bedminster.' Suddenly a load more angels appeared, singing about God, saying 'Glory to God in heaven. May the people God loves know peace'. When the gaggle of angels had disappeared the taxi drivers picked themselves up off the ground and said to one another 'Let's go down to Bedminster and find out what's going on.' So they drove fast, in convoy. With the help of their sat-navs they found Mary and Joe and the baby wrapped in mechanic's clothes, lying in a halved oil drum.

When they had taken the whole scene in, they took out their mobile phones, found a signal up from the tucked away place where the garage lay, and texted all their contact lists to say what had happened. All who got the messages – in Bristol and beyond, all over the world – were amazed at what the taxi drivers told them. But Mary treasured everything that was happening and wondered about them deep in her heart.

The taxi drivers returned to their ranks, praising God for all they had seen and heard, as it had been told them.'

In the middle of the authorities' efforts to make sure everyone is counted, the good news of God's concern for people unfolds among people who seem to count for little. The main people in the Nativity story come from places well away from the centre of power. In our modern take on the story: from Devon, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Romania and Poland. In Luke's story: from up-country Nazareth and from the underclass of migrant shepherds.

The people who don't count for much in society count for everything when it comes to sharing God's love and bringing in God's kingdom.

The little person is large in the sight of God.

The small person is tall in the eyes of God.

What's small and insignificant can play a vital part  
in God's will being done,  
in God's love being shared,  
in God's desire to see everyone follow Jesus be achieved.

Let's think about some of our regular Christmas things: how much does their size, how much does their external or visible impact matter?

What presents have some of our children brought to celebrate with us this morning?

Will they be the biggest / brightest / best gifts of the day?

Some will be – some won't be...

To remind us of how the small, out of the way 'people who don't count for much' count infinitely to God, I'm going to give everyone here a little present. It's just a little picture to take away. You could put it on a mantle-piece. You could perhaps put it on your Christmas tree and add it to your Christmas tree decorations.

It's a gift to remind us all that all of us that ,

- no matter what our age,
- no matter what our experience,
- no matter what our relationship to power in our time is,

we are all precious to God. We all count among the people God invites to share his love and follow his son. The son we are invited to follow starts life, in Luke's gospel, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger in Bethlehem. Taking place in Great Britain in 2012, the story might have been of Christ wrapped in mechanics overalls, laid in an oil drum in Bedminster, Bristol or, as in the picture you are being given, being born in a bus shelter. Whatever the nativity scene, God's call is the same: 'Everyone has a part to play in sharing God's love – revealed in its fullness in Jesus born in Bethlehem and raised in glory'. Amen.

Mark Pilgrim