*St Mary*’*s Parish Church, Handsworth Eucharist 24th December 2021, First Mass of Christmass*

Masking Identity?

*Isaiah 527-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 11-4; John 11-14*

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a Fathers’ only Son, full of grace and truth. [John 15]*

If the use of masks continues, I am thinking of a new career as a ventriloquist! I would, ordinarily, be no good at it but a mask hides a multitude of sins!

Sometimes it is clear when we try to mask things and others it is not:

when we try to hide the smell of cigarettes with a mint whilst our whole being reeks of nicotine – that is clear enough;

or of being asked how we are and saying that we are fine when it is clear we are not succeeding in holding things together – that, too, is clear enough;

or of being lonely in a crowd – some people are much more successful at masking that.

There are some who say that the Incarnation masks Gods’ true identity (although I have to confess that I quite like the idea of a manger scene with the Infant Christ wearing a light blue NHS standard issue face mask to complement Mary’s frock).

There is so much that we can see in the Infant Jesus that reflects all of God:

* **Love**: Love is unmasked at Christmass! One very simple carol says, ‘Love came down at Christmass’ and that is the heart of it. The motivation behind the Incarnation, of God becoming human, is the love that he had for the human race. If you have ever been to Sunday School you will have memorised John 3:16 – ***For God so loved that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have eternal life***. That makes the motivation of love explicit.

That love is inspirational and lies behind the exchange of gifts as a token of love. Having had to watch the film, *Love Actually*, at least 4 times every year as part of an A level course I am all too familiar with the dialogue. In the introduction it states that of all the calls made by people on doomed flights on 9/11 none were of hate or anger but were messages of love. When it matters, love shines through.
* **The power to make a difference**: Power is unmasked at Christmass, especially the power to make a difference. We know that there are situations – addictions, debt, abuse – that will not sort themselves out: they need an intervention. God saw the human condition with its self-centredness, sinfulness and indifference and decided that an intervention was needed. Jesus was sent to be born and was born to die so that we would know that God had intervened to make forgiveness a reality.

We celebrate the potential in Christ to make a positive difference to us all at Christmass. As with any intervention we each have to be open to it to begin the process.
* **The birth of hope**: Hope is unmasked at Christmass, as it is most often at the birth of a wanted child. Hope forces us to look forward to what will be and hope empowers us to keep on going until it is accomplished. The birth of Jesus makes hope specific – instead of wishing that God would just do something, anything, hope makes it clear that God intervened in Christ to forgive us, give us a future and form us so that we become like Christ.

This isn’t the naive hope of a domestic violence victim that things might get better, or the desperate wishing of an adolescent that the magical red suit might appear through the central heating ventilation and fulfil their wish-list: it is made real in the flesh and blood of Jesus that we will share in this Eucharist.

The challenge for us is to accept that we cannot hide behind our masks in the hope that we can convince ourselves that God doesn’t see through them, that he doesn’t see who we are.