

SUNDAY 24TH DECEMBER - CHRISTMAS EVE

The Forth Sunday of Advent

Read: Revelation 21:15-22:5

'Its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb.' **Revelation 21:22**

I don't really have the attention span for watching television, but for a few minutes recently I became intrigued by a programme called, 'Dubai: Playground of the Rich.' It delighted to show the jaw-dropping opulence of that brand new city: its fabulous apartments with their golden lavatory seats, its artificial islands with their luxury homes, its citizens with their seemingly limitless desire to consume. Dubai is an attempt to build an earthly paradise.

And what a sad and miserable place it is compared to John's breath-taking vision of the New Jerusalem! John draws heavily on the prophecy of Ezekiel 47 to describe a place of dazzling and wondrous light. Its scale is vast, its gates are ever open, its walls are adorned with jewels, its doors are pearls. And this city is not an exclusive playground only for the rich. It is our future. It is the eternal home of all those who trust in Jesus Christ.

But perhaps the most striking part of this description comes in verse 22. There is no need for a temple in this New Jerusalem, because the temple is the Lamb – it's Jesus himself. The heart of this vision of the future is the proximity of God. This is no distant, aloof God who requires the formality of a cultic setting. In the New Jerusalem God is with us, living amongst us, completely bound up in our lives.

Tonight and tomorrow we will be celebrating Christmas. In utter poverty and stark simplicity our God will come to be with us. In Jesus, God has come to share in our ordinary lives, to live as one of us. And because He has assumed our humanity, we who offer our lives to Him can share in His divinity. Because He has entered into our poverty, we can share in His riches.

Delight this Christmas in the intimacy and the closeness of the God we meet in Jesus. He has come to be with us on earth. So we can be with Him in the perfect splendour of the New Jerusalem.

The Rt Revd Philip North, Bishop of Blackburn.