

**(Tearfund Christmas material, 2002)****A place of freedom**

- Christmas isn't always easy for people:
  - many are lonely at such a family time;
  - for others, memories of the loss of loved ones are particularly hard to bear;
  - and for many the stresses of busyness or expense or intense time with people we don't otherwise see are difficult
- But the first Christmas can be a source of joy and peace to us today:
  - even as it brought such joy to Mary and Joseph, the angels, the shepherds and the wise men!
- It was the start of something amazing:
  - a vivid, concrete demonstration of how much God loves each one of us!
- In Jesus' birth God says: Here I am
  - inviting each one of us to get to know him better
  - inviting each one of us to live in the freedom he came to earth to bring
- He came to bring freedom to people trapped by sin and poverty and injustice that flow from it:
  - and he wants us, like him, to set people free;
  - people like Aguer and her brothers and sisters;
  - set them free so they can fulfil their potential and become all that God wants them to be
- **Christmas is the dawn of freedom!**

**A place of welcome**

- Wise men and shepherds alike welcomed Jesus' arrival with what they had:
  - gold, frankincense, myrrh
  - themselves!
- The inn-keeper let Mary and Joseph have the shelter he had:
  - even though he probably didn't think it was up to much!
- It doesn't matter if we are rich or not so rich, we can share what we have to give people a warm welcome this Christmas:
  - whether they are refugees in Egypt;
  - or folk who have come to this city to study or work;
  - or our neighbours who are "outsiders" at Christmas
  - or even simply the folk who will be here at worship with us between now and Christmas...
- In Isaiah 58 (**the passage that has interspersed our service**) God shows us how he wants us to worship him:
  - it's not just about coming to church;
  - he wants us to demonstrate his love to people in concrete, practical ways
- Like the star shining over Jesus' birthplace, God promises that when we show this kind of love:
  - when we welcome poor or lonely people into our lives, sharing what we have
  - we'll bring light into the world
- **And so Christmas marks a place of welcome!**

**A place to belong**

- In Isaiah 58 God speaks of the importance of building people up and restoring them into communities:
  - giving them a new start and a place to belong through life's ups and downs
- That's why Jesus came to earth to be with us:
  - so we could have a new start, and be restored into God's community!

- And so God invites us to help him restore and rebuild other people's shattered lives:
  - we can be involved in helping "repair" broken lives
- Through Jesus we can find a place to belong:
  - when we feel broken by the hard things in life...
  - or when we're trying to get alongside someone who does
- For God has given us that place to belong: in his family!
- We've learned about some of the help that Tearfund's Christian partners are giving to families in great need in different parts of the world:
  - working with God to transform peoples lives;
- We can stand alongside those partners by giving and praying - more information at the back, or speak to Helen or Sheila
  - but we also stand alongside them as we seek, in God's name, to work for people's freedom, to make them welcome, and give them a place to belong!
- After all, that's what Christmas is all about!