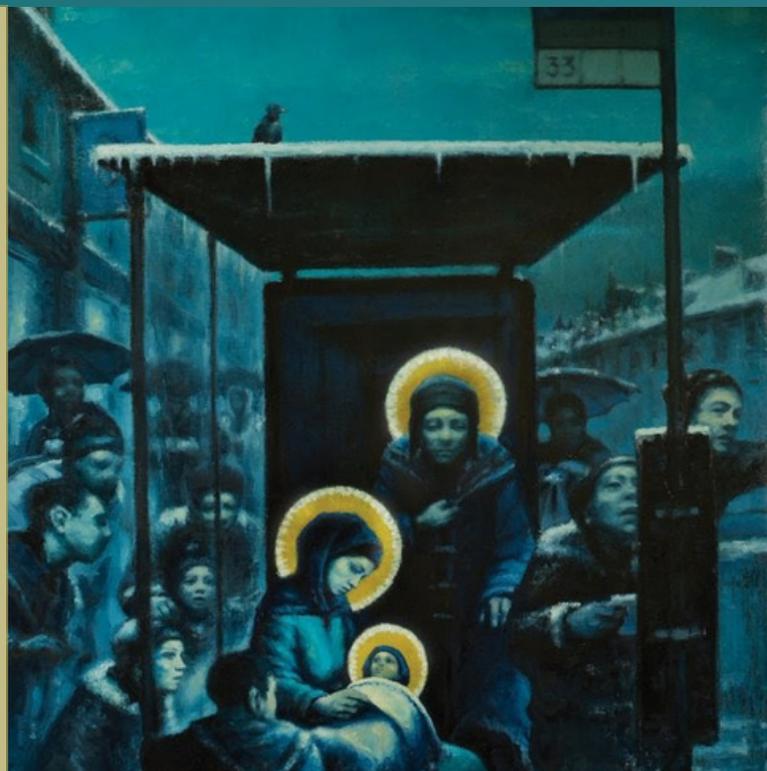


MODERATOR'S 2022 *ADVENT MESSAGE*

Is Jesus the help we are looking for?



There is a poignant segment in the Advent readings for this year that finds John the Baptist languishing in Herod's dungeon and doubting whether Jesus is the promised Messiah. Despite his earlier calls to prepare the way for the Messiah, events have turned for the worse. So, he sends his disciples to ask whether Jesus really is the promised Messiah, or should we look elsewhere (see Matthew 11: 2-3).

I am sure that there are many in the world today who share the doubt! Ukrainian Orthodox families experiencing Christmas this year in cramped refugee conditions so far away from home, or worse still, in areas of Ukraine where fear of missile strikes will dominate their 'festive' season! And, in a similar vein, homeless families in our country, crammed into temporary accommodation of motel units, struggling to meet rising food costs.

The story of hardship, anguish and suffering is repeated many times over in our world as we approach Christmas this year.

So where are you Jesus, in this world with so much suffering? With John the Baptist we may be justified in asking the question, Are you the hope we are looking for? Or should we look elsewhere?

Part of the answer comes for me in asking this question, Where would Jesus be born in 2022? In 2008, the UK Churches Advertising Network asked that question and came up with this answer: a freezing bus shelter. They then made a poster depicting this and had it displayed in over 1,000 bus shelters across the UK.

This was a message of hope: God incarnated help that comes into the places of poverty and despair. Originally it was a baby born in the middle of a winter night, out where the animals were kept. This speaks a message of God's presence in the most unlikely and despairing places.

In the bus stop posters, some of the bystanders see what is happening and respond with worshipful devotion, while others are too busy checking the bus timetable.

May our churches help people to stop and notice the hope that the birth of Jesus brings to our needy world this year.

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