

Midnight Mass 2024

Beneath all the beauty, all the candlelight, all the tradition and all the tat – beneath all the busyness and excitement and madness of the season, we're here for something very simple.

A baby is born, Jesus of Nazareth. The greatest, the best, most beautiful, most truly human being there has ever been, and ever will be.

And because of who he was, and what he did, the life of every single person in this church, and every single life there has ever been has been changed for ever. *Your* life has been changed forever.

Full of grace, that last reading called him. Full of grace.

What's grace? It's the divine power to start again, to set free, to forgive, to heal. It's what makes the exhausted fresh, what makes the ugly beautiful. And it's called grace because you can't earn it, or produce it, or control it – it just comes. Comes as a gift, like the sunshine, like the rain. Comes before we deserve it. It comes to us, it surrounds us, it flows into us all as gift – it's just *given*. Grace. Given in this baby. It's in him that all the beauty begins to flow into the human race. Full of grace, he comes to fill us with grace, to make us anew with grace.

And the Gospel is that that is true whoever we are, and wherever we find ourselves.

It's true for the dying man. Grace comes to him, and breathes its promise. Death will still come, of course – but death in grace is made just a doorway to glory. We do not end in sadness and tears and coffins, we end in wonder and joy beyond comprehension. Because of grace, we will live, we will rejoice.

It's true for the woman with Alzheimers. Grace comes to her, and breathes its promise. You will not in disintegration, in loneliness: you will be put back together again, you will be you. There is such a thing as healing, on the far side of all this, when all diseases have done their worst. Because of grace, we will live, we will rejoice.

It's true for the one who has done a terrible thing, who cannot look in the mirror. Grace comes and breathes its promise: there's a future for you too. You can belong again, you can come home, you can be at peace with God and your neighbour. What you have done can be forgiven. Because of grace, we will live, we will rejoice.

It's true for you, whatever your poverty, whatever your exhaustion, whatever damage you have sustained – grace comes even to you, and breathes its promise. It shall be well: whatever it is, however impossible that seems, it shall be well, and you will rejoice.

And all that, because of this baby: because he came to be one of us, because he lived, and died and rose again. Because of this baby, we are surrounded by grace. Come what may, it shall all be well. He has come to find us, and He's taking us home.

To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.