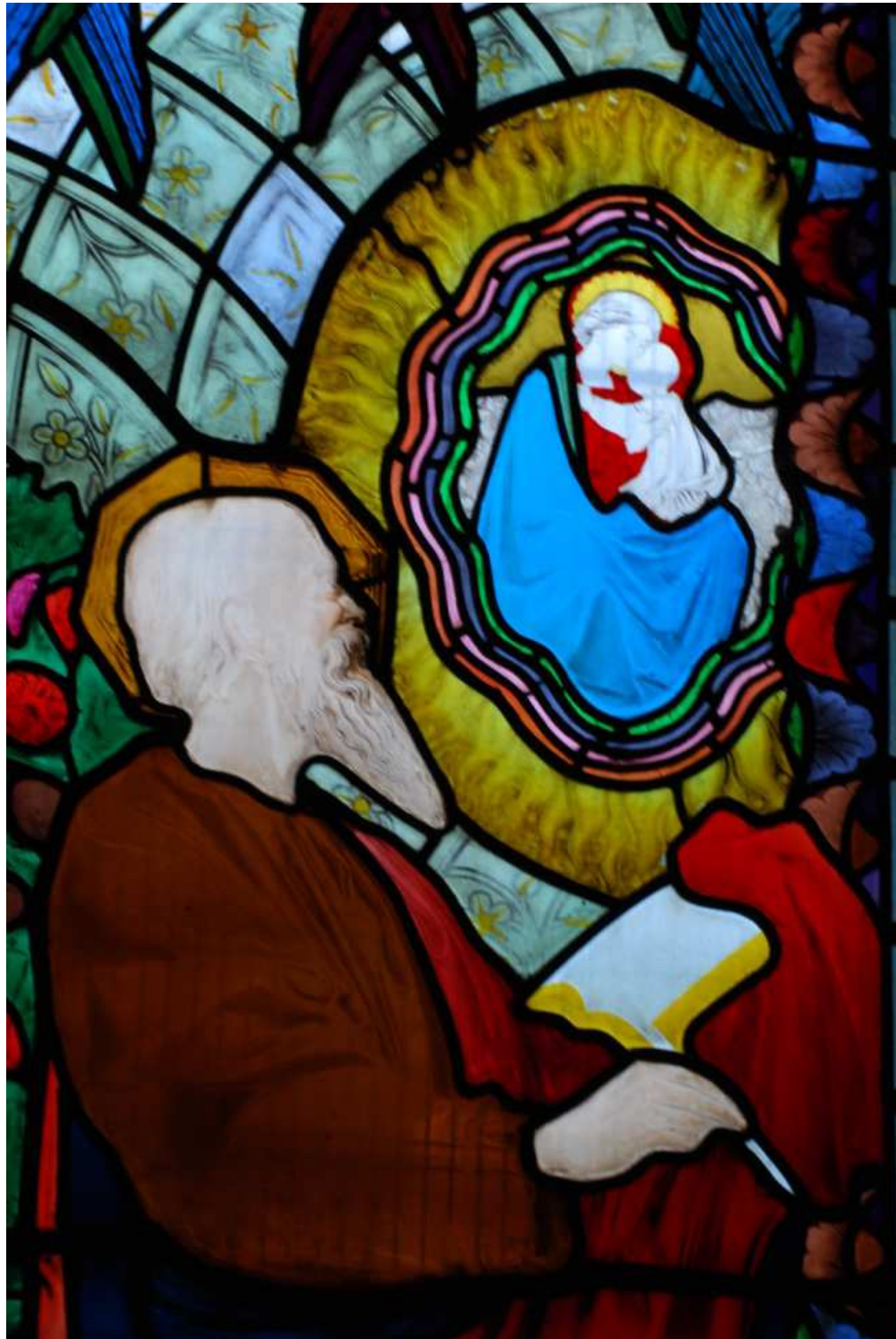


# The Christmas Story

Told through the stained glass windows and furnishings  
in Frome St John the Baptist parish church

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Then the LORD said to Isaiah,

“Go out, to meet (King) Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderer’s Field. Say to him, ‘Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. .... If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.’”

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz,

“Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

But Ahaz said,

“I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”

Then Isaiah said,

“Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The young woman will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.”

Isaiah’s vision in Isaiah 7:14

Window in Lady Chapel, NW corner, by O’Connor (Jnr) of London (1860’s)



This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,

“Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet:

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

Mary betrothed to Joseph.  
Window in Lady Chapel, N side, by Kempe & Co Ltd (1920's)





In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a young woman pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.

The young woman's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said,

“Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.”

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

The Annunciation to Mary by Gabriel.  
Window in Lady Chapel, E side, by Kempe & Co Ltd (1920's)





But the angel said to her,

“Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

The angel answered,

“The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.”

The Annunciation to Mary by Gabriel.  
Reredos in Lady Chapel by Walter Tower of Kempe & Co Ltd (1920’s)





“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”  
Then the angel left her.

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

In a loud voice she exclaimed:

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!”

Mary being greeted by her cousin Elizabeth.  
Window in Nave, N side, by Kempe & Co Ltd (1920’s following original John Hardman & Co design of 1860’s)



And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name.  
His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.  
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  
He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.”

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.



In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Mary lays Jesus in a manger.  
Window in Chancel, N side, by Michael O'Connor (1840's)







And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them,

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,  
 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
 and on earth peace to those on whom  
 his favour rests.”

Jesus lying in the manger.  
 Window in Lady Chapel, E side, by Kempe & Co Ltd  
 (1920's)



When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,  
“Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord,  
“Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts.

When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.  
For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”



The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him.

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Simeon welcomes Jesus in the temple.  
Window in Lady Chapel, E side, by  
Kempe & Co Ltd (1920's)





After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked,

“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied,  
“for this is what the prophet has written:

“‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said,

“Go and search carefully for the child.  
As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”



After they had heard the king,  
they went on their way, and  
the star they had seen when it  
rose went ahead of them until  
it stopped over the place  
where the child was.

When they saw the star, they  
were overjoyed. On coming  
to the house, they saw the  
child with his mother Mary,  
and they bowed down and  
worshiped him. Then they  
opened their treasures and  
presented him with gifts of  
gold, frankincense and myrrh.

And having been warned in a  
dream not to go back to Her-  
od, they returned to their  
country by another route.

The Adoration of the Magi.  
Window in Lady Chapel, E side, by Kempe  
& Co Ltd (1920's)





When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.

“Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet:

“Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Mary, Joseph and Jesus leaving for Egypt.  
Window in Chancel, N side, by Michael  
O'Connor (1840's)





When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

“A voice is heard in Ramah,  
weeping and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more.”

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said,

“Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.

Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.





Nativity scene on reredos of St Francis Chapel altar (S side of church)  
Inscription: Verbum caro factum est - 'And the Word was made flesh' (John 1.14)



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.