When asked to describe a poem, in ordinary terms, a notable poet, said, if I wanted to communicate meaning in ‘ordinary terms’, I would not have written a poem!

Listening and reading the biblical authors, it would appear that they were of the same opinion. How can the mysteries of God that starts with the birth of Christ in Bethlehem be described in ordinary terms. This is also dare I say; the plight of the preacher, how do we communicate such wonder, ‘that struck the world amazed’ in ordinary terms. Can we as time progresses from century to century hold on to the original story when, then, it could not be told by witnesses in ordinary terms. And what might we ask is ordinary terms when it comes to the things of God’s relationship with humankind at any time?

Poets, prose and hymn writers have for centuries tried to describe the birth of Jesus. Pestel, in the early 1600s described it thus; ‘Behold the great creator makes himself a house of clay, a robe of virgin flesh he takes which he will wear for ay. Hark! Hark! The wise eternal Word like a weak infant cries; in form of servant is the Lord and God in cradle lies. This wonder struck the world amazed, it shook the starry frame; squadrons of spirits stood and gazed, then down in troops they came. Glad shepherds ran to view this sight; a choir of angles sings, and eastern sages with delight adore the King of kings. Then Pestel says; ‘Join then all hearts that are not stone, and all our voices prove, to celebrate this Holy One, the God of Peace and love.”
St. John describes the birth of Jesus in very deep theological language and in extraordinary terms; ‘The word was made flesh and lived amongst us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the Son of the Father, full of grace and truth’.

So how will you and I make this celebration of the birth of our saviour Jesus Christ an extraordinary occasion this year? The Christmas message is after all a very simple message as Archbishop Breslin, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cape Town said yesterday; *The simplicity of Christmas is probably its greatest revelation. It reveals to us the nature of God who comes to us as a helpless infant rather than a mighty king. In its simplicity we recognise the goodness of our humanity through God’s willingness to take on human flesh.”* Said Archbishop Breslin. And herein lies the rub! Can we recognise the goodness of our humanity through God’s willingness to take on human flesh? Can we believe that we have a God who gives us all the chances to simply be good?

I believe that we who had the privilege to be in South Africa in the last month were given another example of how we can recognise the goodness of our humanity. The passing of Madiba Nelson Mandela was as far as I’m concerned such an example and opportunity. In fact the response of all our people seemed to indicate that for ten days we *could recognise the goodness of our humanity*, it was so tangible that it also *struck the world amazed*. But have you noticed how when Monday the 16th came we snapped back into becoming a people too selfish to reconcile and the very ones who paid lip service to reconciliation could not bring themselves to do it, instead tried to blame others. Can we not this Christmas, dear friends find it in our hearts to live out one value which we heard of ad nauseam on television and radio during the ten days of mourning? Can we not ask our president to do the
honourable thing….stand down… and give leadership to someone else….someone who can lead and who can restore dignity to the position of president so that we can again recognise the goodness of our humanity?

Madiba’s passing made us all such proud South Africans; we have been going around showing off that we are from Mandela’s land. If we can do it for ten days we can do it for ever. If God was willing to take on human flesh so that we could recognise the goodness of our humanity in each other, let us, for goodness sake, can make it a lifestyle.

Mandela did not waver in his quest for a South Africa where the dignity of all is respected. When he was released from prison on 11 February 1994, he quoted himself by repeating words he first made at his trial for treason on 20 April 1964. “I have dedicated my life to the struggle of the African people…I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for, and to see realised. But my Lord, if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die”

Maybe Nelson Mandela had to die so that all South Africans could similarly dedicate themselves to a democratic and free society in which all live together in harmony with equal opportunities. A country where the have nots do not get more at the expense of the have-nots, And those who lead ensure that the poor are first recipients of housing, sanitation and employment.
Can we commit ourselves to rid our country of adverse poverty which results in 1400 people homeless after a fire because someone had a fight with the drug dealer and petrol bombed a shack with no thought for the other people living there?

The birth of Christ cannot be described in ordinary terms and neither can the gift of God to humanity. It was no ordinary thing that God took on human flesh so that humankind could recognise its own goodness. The same God who gave us Jesus is the God who gave us Nelson Mandela. That is the same God who inspired Mandela through good times and bad. The same God who reigned supreme when the young Rolihlahla became Nelson, and later when he became the first democratically elected president of South Africa. When he passed on the world’s focus was on us, the world congratulated all of us, since all of us have made our contributions to Mandela’s ideas and all of us are proud participates of our society.

As we celebrate this extraordinary Christmastide may we be constantly aware today and every day that we must recognise the goodness of our humanity in each one that we meet. For;

‘The word was made flesh and lived amongst us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the Son of the Father, full of grace and truth’. AMEN