Romans 15:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12

Did you notice the things I said about Matthew -
Old testament - Isaiah quote
fulfilment - John a proper prophet
Against the pharisees - brood of vipers
Adn watch out if you miss Jesus - god can raise up other children of Abraham

But John comes saying - Prepare

And as we can see by Daggons rd - a nicely prepare road can make all the difference..

Before Jesus came the first time - John teh baptist came - he prepared them alright -
Hard preaching, dunk in cold water - flee from the coming wrath!!

(Is this why John's disciples come to Jesus later saying - are you the one who we've been waiting for? - Jesus different to expectations)

How are you getting ready for xmas - preparations..

Prepare

You can get ready - a few still do - by giving things up
Like Lent, we give up flowers
Some deny themselves chocolate, or carols or mince pies or whatever.

Others prepare by doing things - but they can all point to Christ…

Writing cards - thinking of others

Presents - being generous, opening our hearts

In all this busyness - we can bring preparing for Jesus in it.

Buying food - we can think about nourishment, we can think about bodies
And that the divine chose to inhabit a body..

Maybe its getting the spare room ready - those preparations - changing the bed
Making a space - is there space in your heart fro Jesus
For those travellers that come unbidden..

Or maybe we're doing the travelling - needs preparing, packing
Just the holy family were also packing and travelling.
When you're stuck on teh M3 over Christmas - think about being pregnant, with a donkey,
And what THAT would have been like.

We have been preparing in church -
Lights strewn everywhere, tinsel, decorations…

I've made a stable and a crib…

Now I just need to **wait**..

We're not good at waiting. Not real waiting.

We live in a rushing world - 2 minutes is too long, half an hour is like a life time
Oh I've just got 5 minutes, I'll do this, or that..

We distract ourselves, and we turn pleasures into chores
Because waiting is hard…
To sit with not knowing.. your mind goes everywhere, the best, the worst,
We feel judged, and awful. We are very bad at just waiting…

Partly because we don't know what to expect..
We know what we want to happen, hope will happen, but will it?

Now when Jesus came to earth..
The lord of all, the divine made human - god made vulnerable, one of us
Coming among us - leaving his home, coming to stay with us…
Into exile - an alien world…
There was no way of knowing what that would be like..
Even those who were waiting - for 600 years since Isaiah's prophecy,
For 400 years since Malachi
For 200 years of roman occupation..

Yet they still missed him.. because he was so different to what they were looking for,
And they couldn't change or be open enough.
The waiting had fossilised things into meaningless traditions..

And so There was an empty crib but before that it was a manger full of hay

Waiting for our lord.

There were others in the stable - or the cave
There were others in the country, in the world
There were even better cribs - cots, cradles, slings, Moses baskets perhaps

It did not know what was to come

……..
And what are you hoping for this Christmas?
all that might go well
The guests coming.

That it will be ok, that my health be ok.. all that uncertainty

Who will come into this empty crib?
……

The weight of the past
The fears of the present -

That's a lot to put in a cradle..

Can we bring it to god
Can we lay it at Jesu feet, or stuff it in his crib?

……
Are we reminded that With this arrival, things change

Everything changed - they told me at theological college - its hard to grasp
The stone rippling out - forwards and backwards from this central event in history…

An unknown child in a forgotten backwaters - how can this speck go on to change it all
Countries, rulers, the roman empire, western civilisation..

But wars still happen, people are still hurt and hungry
Yet its different - the central decisive act has happened - and it is all different..

And backwards through time as well - the kairos event - not time as linear progression

But its hard to hold on to.
…….
But have hope - because of this cradle.

Paul tells the Romans - *Christ has become a servant of the Jews so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed*

Jesus fulfils the promise,

Trust him with your future..

And given hope - what are your hopes / wishes for this Christmas, for the future.

What might this manger, this crib, mean.. - it is full of potential - it could all be different..

Heres's a good bit - its **already** happened,

he **has come** and makes a difference,
whether you can feel you can trust or have hope or faith at all..

All you need to do is pay attention - to notice it..
The rainbow here, the robin there - the kindness here, the glimmer of peace there..

The kingdom is all around us - but we must open our eyes to see.

Maybe that's why we need to wait - the anticipation makes us aware

Lets be aware of the right thing s- not the frippery and trivia - but goodness, kindness, love, charity, etc etc

Then we can live with that Christian hope - which a certainty..

……..
Hope fulfilled - Romans -

The Root of Jesse will spring up, in him the Gentiles will hope."
May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.