

CHRISTINE LOW - 24/12/22 11.30pm

There are quite a few here who won't know me, my name is Chris Low and I am visiting NZ along with my husband, John, in order to spend some time with our family here in Lower Hutt. Christmas here is somewhat different from what we'd be experiencing back at home in Yorkshire. **Slide 2 (snowy garden)**

This was our garden at Christmas last year, quite a different experience.

One of the many joys of being here in NZ is walking along a beach and finding a Paua shell. **SLIDE 3 (group of paua shells)** We don't have these on our beaches in the UK.

Looking more closely at these beautiful shells, I was struck by the thought that whatever we or others may think or say about us, God looks at each of us and sees the precious child that we truly are and longs to help us to see, and to show the world, what our creator sees.

As you'll be well aware, a paua shell has two sides, **SLIDE 4 (inner shell)** one is smooth to the touch, lustrous and stunningly beautiful, reflecting back the colours of sea and sky; whilst the other **SLIDE 5 (outer shell)** ,is rough, dull and altogether unappealing.

All of which is rather like you and me. We are all made in God's image and so we all have those Christ-like

qualities inside us. However, sometimes all we or the world see is the dull outer shell, whilst God sees who and what we truly are. The dearly loved, precious individual, we were created to be.

Whatever our life experience or circumstances, we each have the potential to change and become what God sees. The choice is ours.

So, what has this to do with Christmas? Well, the paua shell can be seen as a kind of modern parable for the Christmas story, one which tells of that child whose birthday we celebrate; Jesus, the one who grew up to be the Saviour and Redeemer of all humanity; as we read in the Gospel of John Chapter 3: 16

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Thanks to Jesus, no-one is beyond redemption if they turn to him; but during his time on earth, opinion about him was as sharply divided as it is today. Many saw him as just the carpenter's son and of no account.

At best, many saw him as a great teacher and prophet, whilst to others he was a troublesome radical; a threat to the status quo. To them he was rather like the upper side of the paua shell. **SLIDE 5 AGAIN**

But to those who could truly see, he was the Son of God; the long-awaited Saviour and King. The one who came to give his life as a ransom for our sins and by so doing open the door to a true relationship with God.

SLIDE 6 (Shining polished shell).

This amazing story is summed up beautifully in the poem, 'One Solitary Life' by Ken Blanchard

He was born in an obscure village.

He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty.

He then became an itinerant preacher.

He never held office.

He never had a family or owned a house.

He didn't go to college.

He had no credentials but himself.

He was only thirty-three when the public turned against him.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone,
and today he is the central figure of the human race.

All the armies that ever marched,

all the navies that ever sailed,

all the parliaments that ever sat,

and all the kings that ever reigned

have not affected the life of man on this earth

as much as that one solitary life

When we let Jesus Christ into our life, we grow more like him, we change, and all that inner beauty that God sees, slowly becomes more visible to the world outside. **SLIDE 7 (SHELL BEGINNING TO BE REVEALED).**

And as we let the Holy Spirit lead us into Christ's ways, the Christ-light shines through more and more. **SLIDE 8. (MORE OF THE SHELL'S LUSTRE SHINING THROUGH)**

So as you go from here to celebrate Christmas, with all that it brings, I pray that you'll take a moment to reflect on the beauty of the paua shell, which is just a tiny part of God's amazing creation. As you do so, remember that to God you are precious and deeply loved, with all the potential to be as beautiful inside and out as the shell; and that with the help of our Lord's Holy Spirit, you too can shine with the light of Christ, bringing, light and beauty and hope to the world. **SLIDE 9 (SLIDE 5 PICTURE)**