

Flowers in the Desert

Advent, the time of looking forward from the darkness towards the flickering flame of hope, has a particular resonance in Openshaw. We believe there is hope. Hope against hope. As I write this, the local newspaper carries an article that our regeneration process has been delayed yet again by political manoeuvring at the Town Hall. To hope is to be the prophet crying in the wilderness. Things can be different. Things will be different. Things must be different. We believe there is hope. Perhaps that should have been the title of this book?

We wait, we long for, we hope,
reality seems dark as night,
drab as the peeling paint,
dowdy as damp ridden houses.

We wait, we long for, we hope,
peace seems a long forgotten dream,
as wars continue to rage,
as people die from hunger and bullets.

We wait, we long for, we hope,
as Herod seeks out a new born child,
soldiers searching from house to house,
the wail of mourning rife in Judea.

We wait, we long for, we hope,
as the new-born child grows to maturity
itinerant healer and teller of stories,
touching the outcast and the lost.

We wait, we long for, we hope,
as hope itself seems to die,
the saviour hangs on a cross,
a tomb's silence deafening the skies.

And as we wait, as we long for, as we hope,
we look for the signs
daring to believe there is hope
dreaming of a miracle.

And as we wait, as we long for, as we hope,
the signs of heaven on earth are here
in the breaking of bread
and the pouring of wine.

In the rising of a bright star in the East
we see glimpses of God's shalom,
and the desert is imbued
with the delicate fragrance
of flowers pushing up through the earth.

In the journeying of exotic travellers
we see glimpses of God's shalom,

and the desert is permeated
with the inspiring melody
of birdsong wafting in the air.

In the birth of a baby in a stable
we see glimpses of God's shalom,
and the desert is infused
with the riotous extravagance
of flowers bursting into bloom.

In the arrival of rugged shepherds
we see glimpses of God's shalom,
and the desert is saturated
with the gentle drenching of spring rains
as they hit the scorched earth.

In the eyes of refugees at play
we see glimpses of God's shalom,
and the desert is refreshed
by the earthy aroma
of warm, wet soil.

We wait, we long for, we hope
and in the waiting, in the longing, in the hoping,
we take plain, simple bread
sign of Christ's body
broken for the life of the world.

We wait, we long for, we hope
and in the waiting, in the longing, in the hoping,
we take rich, full-bodied wine
sign of wonder and celebration
the promise of shalom for the world.

(Share bread and wine)

So we continue to wait, to long for, to hope,
to look for glimpses of God's shalom,
when the desert shall be infused
with the riotous extravagance
of flowers bursting into bloom.