



ELY CATHEDRAL

Weekly Reflection

by Canon Jessica Martin

8 December 2020

Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.

It's the third day of freezing fog. Each morning I've walked over to the Cathedral in a darkness that never seems to lift. The West Tower vanishes into mist, its top invisible, The Octagon is like a drawing in soft pencil, hardly there at all.

By the river, herons start up on the towpath bank, almost beneath our feet, flying like gawky spirits across the swollen river. Great skeins of geese squabble and honk on the mere which is forming between the railway line and the path. The constant fog makes me think of all the mists in magical tales – over marshes, or cities or castles – which show that the place is enchanted. You can venture in, but when you come out, you are changed.

All across the Scriptures, God sits in clouds, protecting his children from a light too bright to endure. Clouds hide him in the tent of meeting, and in the wilderness journey with Moses at daytime, and in the vision of Isaiah of the Temple where the seraphim cried 'the whole earth is full of his glory' and the watcher saw the house 'fill with smoke'. And, on the mountain, when Jesus was briefly transfigured into a being of immortal light before the stunned and sleepy eyes of his three companions, a great cloud rolled over them, hiding the brightness they had briefly seen. Light and cloud: hidden majesty.

Truly, you are a God who hides himself, writes the visionary in Isaiah, chapter 45. He's drawing a contrast with the things which people make – the idols – which are made to be seen, which people carry in their hands or in their baggage when they travel - but which cannot change anything in people's lives. He's saying, God isn't something we make, and we cannot see him, but instead of us carrying *him*, *he carries us*. He's the underpinning of our lives, the company keeping us sane and kind when we are too much alone, the tower invisible in the mist, the street light shining through freezing fog, the shielding wingspan of a majestic bird, keeping us safe under his feathers. Invisible, he is also everywhere, blessing like the rain that falls which will make the earth full of green and growing things.

And if at the moment we cannot see its growth, we can know it is there, and that spring will come. The bulbs are already shooting, the bare trees are waiting with tight, hoar-frosted buds for the right time. Behind and within and below every ordinary thing is the hidden God, a charged and concentrated sphere of life, waiting to open up into glory.

All there is for us to do is to wait, and hope, and look for the right time, the time when the marvel will reveal itself. It will be a hidden majesty even then, a piece of foolish weakness, crying for our care, so that we may discover all over again, in the sight of a child, that the ordinary goodness of life is the holiest thing of all.

Photo: Jon Chiff