

It is often said that truth is the first casualty of war. Well, if so, we seem to have been at war for a very long time, if not forever. It's certainly harder at the moment to discern the true word, with so much information and misinformation coming at us at once, and our unique willingness, now, to be entertained rather than informed, so that what passes for truth is often a matter of diversion rather than facts on the ground. We follow opinion rather than fact. So where does the Christmas story now fit into this scenario? It's a story, after all, carefully constructed to convey a certain truth but struggling ever more, or so it seems, to be heard above all these other stories that now assail us. Well, perhaps there's a blessing in our present confinement and inability to celebrate together the coming of Christ and the coming of a New Year. I was struck by the lack of noise at midnight, but then I was asleep; more deeply asleep than ever, processing a myriad of Covid-19 dreams. Is this a sign of a re-working going on at a deeper level? A re-ordering of the mind and the spirit, so that when daylight comes, both literally and metaphorically, we can see more clearly and be attuned, now, to the deeper story at work in our lives, in life itself, in the truth of it? And I think of the shepherds and their midnight vision which only makes sense to them when they follow it to Bethlehem and find a Christ-child, just as they 'dreamt'. It's a 'face to face' encounter which speaks of truth or, better, speaks truly in a way that all our imagined encounters never can. So where these ramblings seem to be leading is to a checking out of the truth which lies deeply within each one of us but is so readily obscured by the stories we prefer to tell instead: all those half-truths about the other person which are really half-truths about ourselves: all those fears and prejudices we project onto others. So, paradoxically, perhaps, these days of imposed isolation for so many of us are also days for an imagined re-encounter with the truth that is really out there, and a call to keep the lines of connection open to both 'friend' and 'foe' alike in the hope of that 'face to face' encounter which begins here and ends in God. In other words, we find God in and through one another, whoever that might be. Covid-19 has sharpened this desire and truth within us: the desire for encounter crystallised in the Christ-child: both of God for us and us for God.