Welcome to the 8th weekly prompt on **Gladness and Generosity**.

Across the world people will this evening focus on the story of the baby in the manger.  Perhaps most people nowadays think of it as a fairy story. But it really happened!  Most of the Christmas story is told by Luke in his gospel.  Historians regard Luke as the most reliable writer of the entire Roman period, because of the details in his gospel, and in the Acts of the Apostles, for instance, about Roman governors and the cities that Paul visited, which are confirmed by other ancient writers or archaeological finds.  If the details are accurate, the core of his message can be trusted.  The birth of the Son of God, as described in the Bible, is historical fact!  Let us be glad that our faith is based not on myth but on proven historical evidence!

At the heart of the Christmas story is Mary, who is our role model for generous giving.  Mary gave generously – her body, carrying God’s son, her plans for marriage to Joseph (until the angel explained things to him), her reputation (a child outside marriage incurred severe penalties), and her future, willing to accept God’s plans for her life.  And she gave with gladness, as her hymn of praise in Luke 1: 46 – 55, shows.  The song is in the past tense, but it carries promises for the future too – because God continues to do wonderful things, to bless his people, because it is his nature to do so.

God gives generously to us.  How do we respond?  The third verse of a Victorian hymn – ‘It came upon the midnight clear’, makes a stark point: that the world has been largely deaf to the message of Christ.

‘Yet with the woes of sin and strife, the world has suffered long;

Beneath the angel strain have rolled two thousand years of wrong,

And man at war with man hears not the love-song which they bring;

O hush the noise, ye men of strife, and hear the angels sing!’

Let us pray that the world, in its noisy celebration of Christmas, hears the true message of Jesus!  As Graham Wassell said yesterday morning, we should be shouting out the message of Jesus, not whispering it.

We wish you God’s blessing and peace this Christmas.

*Produced by Daphne and John Wilkins on behalf of the Bents Green Holy Habits Planning Group (Debs Barnett, Glenn Evans, Martyn Read, Graham Wassell, Daphne and John).  You can find more information on the Circuit Holy Habits Programme on the Sheffield Methodist Circuit website and also the Sheffield Methodist Circuit Facebook page.*