

Home

The nights are getting colder and we have had a lot of rain. Everyone needs a home where they can be home and dry. In children's games 'Home' is the place of safety where you can't be caught. In Britain today many people have no home, have recently lost it or are threatened with eviction.

For this issue of *Sofia* called *Home*, we are very honoured that our leading article is written by Paul Nicolson, the formidable Anglican cleric founder of the Zacchaeus Trust and then Taxpayers against Poverty in 2012, to help people who are threatened with loss of income and/or home. He describes his work 'in Christian solidarity with vulnerable and impoverished citizens'. But what he does not write about in this article is his own heroic act of solidarity with those in danger of losing their homes; he has been refusing to pay his council tax, resulting in a long, arduous court battle that might end in imprisonment. 'I am really not in the slightest bit afraid of prison,' Nicolson told the *Guardian*. He was looking forward to his court appearance, where he would have the opportunity to explain why he had decided not to pay his bills. One of the joys of refusing to pay, he said, was that there was a 'wonderful opportunity' to tell the story of why the recent government cuts have had such catastrophic consequences for hundreds of thousands of people. The story can be followed on the website taxpayersagainstopoverty.org.uk

In his article Nicolson mentions Ken Loach's new film *I, Daniel Blake*, which tells the story of two such people. Martin Spence reviews the film on page 24 and describes an episode 'which had me in tears in the cinema (and I wasn't the only one).' From Manchester, the city where Engels wrote *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Dominic Kirkham writes about the ancient origins and importance of hearth and home and the modern predicament. In his article *Equality and Imagination*, Francis McDonagh discusses the growing inequality in Britain, where many rely on food banks, in contrast to the gospel vision of an 'eschatological banquet'. But, he says, 'in the New Testament the coming of

the kingdom of God is a divine intervention, eschatological... As this final intervention failed to come, the urgency of the revolutionary transformation it embodies was blunted, especially when the Christian church effectively became another institution of the state after Constantine's conversion.'

This *Sofia* is published in Advent, the four weeks leading up to Christmas, whose dominant cry is 'O come'. It looks forward to the birth of Christ at Christmas but also to a promised reign of justice and peace on Earth, which will be good news for the poor and homeless. 'O come and do not delay,' pleads the Advent liturgy. As it has now delayed for two thousand years perhaps we should get the message that if we want a kind society we'll have to try and bring it about ourselves.

What I particularly enjoyed in the Nativity scene on the front cover (painted around 1350 by a Bohemian artist) is the image of Joseph pouring water into a washtub with the jug being steadied by the midwife. In one tradition Mary's midwife was the Irish St Brigid, who took over from Brigid, the great Celtic goddess of the hearth and of poetry. The angel Gabriel flew her to Bethlehem to help deliver Jesus, the incarnate Word. I remember the freezing January night when my first child was born. The midwife came at 6 am to our small flat in Leeds (and at least we had a flat). The first thing she said to my husband was: 'Light the fire!' – we had a coal fire which was a nightmare to get going – and the second thing she said to him was: 'Put the kettle on!' My husband looked rather startled; he had probably expected just to stand around looking dazed, as Joseph does in some Nativity paintings.

In Luke's Nativity story there, is, of course, no washtub or nice clean bed, as in this painting. But perhaps this medieval artist was making the point that a mother and her newborn baby need to be clean and comfortable and indeed every human being needs a decent home where they can wash and rest, be warm and at ease, home and dry.