

Dear friends

I am writing this following our visit to the Passion play at Oberammergau in Southern Germany. Rebecca and I are on a pilgrimage in the Tirol area of Austria about 90 minutes south of the town by coach

It was of course the most wonderful and unmissable experience. The play has been offered since 1634 when the village of Oberammergau prayed to God to save them from the plague then ravaging the area and vowed to stage it every 10 years. The play should have been staged in 2020 but was postponed due to Covid. Extraordinarily, the same thing happened in 1920 due to the flu epidemic.

We travelled to Oberammergau on the day we were due to see the play and spent a little time looking round before taking our seats. The afternoon covers the life of Jesus from the triumphal entry into Jerusalem up to Jesus' arrest. Then we had dinner before going back to the specially constructed theatre for the period from Jesus' trial up till the women find the tomb empty. The audience sits under cover but the players are just under a canopy with, during our performance, a well-timed thunder storm and heavy rain. In the afternoon, the performance is in daylight, but in the second half darkness had fallen and this heightens the atmosphere and matches the story.

The actors and support crew put on a magnificent rendering of the story. Their commitment is extraordinary. For example the men start growing their hair and beards a year or so beforehand. This time around they have had to keep them for two years longer than usual!

Altogether it was an experience of a lifetime to be able to see the end of Christ's Ministry brought to life in this way with a superb script (written with revisions most decades), accomplished actors and appropriate music. The choir was especially good and most of the musicians come from the village or close by. One acting couple had a baby boy 3 or 4 weeks ago and he was already involved in a "walk-on" part in his mother's arms in a crowd scene.

There is so much to say but I'd like to pick on just one aspect at this stage. It's the opportunity to hear the many sayings of Christ - love your neighbour as yourself, the Our Father, for example - followed by the last words on the cross all on one day. It brings home the enormity of the task Jesus undertook to bring God's message to us and take our sins upon himself.

Our group had time for reflection both together and individually which made the visit in the form of a pilgrimage a much deeper one. The play continues until October so there's still time to go. Or you could plan for 2030 which this time is only 8 years away!

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 5:16)

With best wishes, Alison Radford