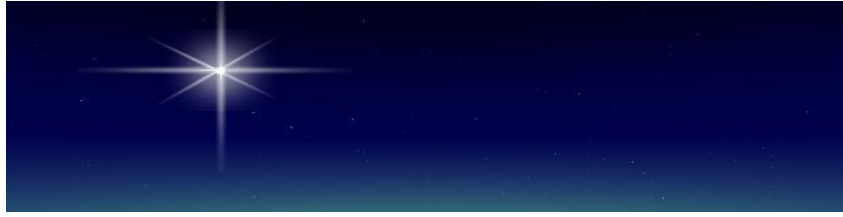


Snapshots: Happy Christmas from a Spacious Place



There is only one main event at Christmas – the birth of Jesus: “The Word became flesh, He lived among us...”¹ Why? So that **we** could know God: “No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made Him known.”²

The park at Szymanow always feels very spacious, with its wide paths, grassy spaces, and trees, which reach up into the sky. On cold winter mornings, the sharpness of the crisp frost and the lower temperature seem to focus the senses. The ice crystals on the ground sparkle as the winter sun catches them, and the cold air refreshes, banishing the last vestiges of sleep and the night just passed.



Every so often there is a sudden movement and a flash of colour. These are the squirrels, still running around the park even at the end of December. The red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*) does not hibernate during winter, but simply does less, and eats more! If the Szymanow squirrels become aware of someone walking past them, they stop what they are doing and look directly at whoever it is - just for a moment. Then, with impressive speed, and a display of gymnastics, they escape into the nearest tree, running up the trunk and into the network of branches that stretch into the sky.



¹ Jn 1:14 (New Jerusalem Bible)

² Jn 1:18 (New Jerusalem Bible)

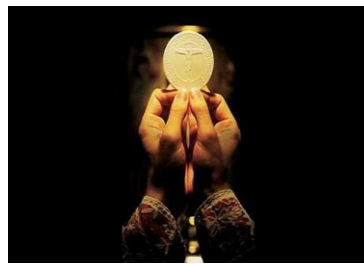
Looking up at a squirrel in a tree, jumping, almost flying, from branch to branch, tree to tree, it is easy to see that this is the place it feels safe – not threatened by people walking past, and able to move quickly, confidently, and freely. On the ground, the average squirrel is limited and open to attack, but up there it finds space, with no obstacles to stop it being what it was created to be.

Jesus came as a little baby, and became a man, so that we could know God, to make relationship possible between the divine and the human. Daily life can often be a struggle for dignity and a fight to keep our eyes on God. In the same way that the squirrels in our park run up trees to find space and a safe place, our spacious, secure place is time spent in the presence of Jesus – Eucharist, prayer before the Holy Sacrament, confession, time reading and reflecting alone, or with others, over God’s word. It is this which gives us room to breathe, a broader perspective, a sense of peace, and this we need to seek; to escape to God, just like the squirrels escape up into the trees.

Here are two verses from the Bible that might help:

“[You] have not handed me over to the enemy, but have given me freedom to roam at large.”³

“In God is my safety and my glory, the rock of my strength. In God is my refuge; trust in him, you people, at all times. Pour out your hearts to him, God is a refuge for us.”⁴



³ Psalm 31:8 (New Jerusalem Bible)

⁴ Psalm 62: 7-8 (New Jerusalem Bible)