

Christmas Talk

Do you remember when the Queen addressed the nation on Christmas Day 1992? Here's a reminder – she said “1992 is not a year on which I shall look back with undiluted pleasure. It has turned out to be an annus horribilis”

Well, I wouldn't be surprised if we all feel that 2020 has also been an annus horribilis. From the floods and terrible raging winds at the beginning of the year, political struggles over Brexit and of course the horrors of the Coronavirus pandemic which have taken over almost every aspect of all of our lives and continues still.

As Christians we know that our hope should be in, and our strength gained from knowing God and all that he has done for us and will continue to do for us through his son Jesus Christ and by the power of his Holy Spirit. Sometimes it's hard though isn't it and being disciplined enough to remember this powerful and important truth often eludes us. We may even get cross with God and forget about him for a while, but that forgetting is never reciprocated. He always remembers, loves, and protects us – without fail.

I'm sorry, that isn't a very happy or indeed festive start to a talk is it? So, let me tell you about something that was said to me a few months ago. I was at work – as most of you know – I work with children, and a little boy really excitedly said to me “Wendy, Wendy, guess what? I've seen baby Jesus grown up”. I was intrigued and after several questions such as what did he look like, did you speak to him, did he speak to you. I was met with answers that very quickly made me realise that who the child had actually seen was Santa!! It got me thinking that at least the child had found a place for Jesus in his Christmas thinking and it also led me to thinking of the idea of gifts that we give to each other (with the help of Santa of course!) and of the gifts that God has given to us. It's true to say that as Christians we should be generous as God has been generous to us first; we should love one another as God has loved us first and we should give up our time and other things for one another as God has done for us first.

However, when we do these things are, we thinking that the reason we do them is in response to what God has done for us? Probably not! We sing and pray throughout the year songs and prayers of thanksgiving don't we and are

probably reminded in that moment just how generous God is but we probably, and I definitely, sometimes forget to carry that thanksgiving over during the rest of the week. By the way, to rectify this I often take myself off on prayer walks or journeys and as I travel around, I make a point of looking out for things and give thanks for them along the way – it's often things that I see every day but without making a conscious effort to see them, they go unnoticed – they are so familiar – just as the Christmas story with the baby Jesus at the centre is so familiar it often goes unnoticed.

Getting back to this time of the year, to Christmas, we have that absolute reminder of just how much we are loved by God. The very familiar verse from John's gospel "for God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life" tells us that truth and it is a truth that is heard by many many people over the Christmas season all over the world but is it something that we are so familiar with that the deep-rooted truth that lies within those few words goes a little unnoticed? Is the real meaning and wonder of what Christmas is all about forgotten in the commercial hype, busyness and preparation including the present buying and wrapping, card writing, Christmas menu planning and cooking, last minute shopping, making sure the house is ready for guests and so on. How often do we stop for a minute during all that preparation to think of the most important Christmas present of all – the baby Jesus who was sent to us because God loves us so much, he sent his only son to live among us and to rescue us from all that was and is not right in the world.

Looking back over this horrible year that we've all witnessed many of us have come to realise that things we probably took for granted before are no longer assured. Holidays and time with family and friends being two top examples. It's been really hard for people and that's without thinking of the people who have had coronavirus and may have lost their lives to the disease. What have been comforting constants in our lives have in many cases disappeared or changed dramatically during this year. A real and true constant that we can rely on not to disappear though is of course God. As psalm 136 says "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever". King David then goes on to

cite many situations where the steadfast love of God endures forever and had he been writing that psalm today he might have added even during a pandemic!!

You've probably read in this month's Butter Cross that Jon mentions the Grinch who stole Christmas. Well, I'm sure you'll all agree that we certainly don't want to be Grinch's and decide not to get involved in the exciting parts of Christmas and nor should we as it is a time to give thanks to one another, to show our appreciation and love to one another but let us not forget that behind all those brightly coloured packages, sumptuous meals and twinkling lights lies a tiny, helpless, and humble baby who was born in a stable in Bethlehem to equally humble parents. A baby who is the greatest gift that we could ever hope for. A baby who would grow up to teach and serve and ultimately lay everything down for us, a baby who was God's most precious gift to us all. Jesus is the constant in our lives that we can rely and depend upon. Jesus is not just for Christmas, he's for life and beyond.

I hope you all have a very happy and blessed Christmas.

Amen

And so, we are very blessed, aren't we, to know the reasons why Jesus came to earth from heaven on that first Christmas morning. But, I wonder, did Mary Know?