

Sermon for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day 2020

Some years ago, I was the rector of a regional parish. The community put on a pageant of sorts each Christmas. As it moved past our front door, I was amused to find that it was liberally sprinkled with witches, warlocks, and Santa Clause. There was not much evidence in the way of Jesus or indeed, God. To be honest, it was good fun, but more than a bit weird. Maybe that was why it was fun.

At a meeting of the Ministers fraternal one of the ministers suggested that it might be a good idea for the church to create a float for the pageant. We all agreed, and we nominated the minister who suggested it to approach the local council with our request. The minister reported back at the next meeting. He was in a state of shock.

When he approached the person at the front desk and asked whether the church might create a float for the Christmas pageant the response alarmed him. The response was this, "What has the church got to do with Christmas?" What indeed!

I do not in any way disparage this young person for the response given. It is a sign of the lack of Christian teaching over many years.

It is sad that in the media the commercial Santa Claus is promoted almost every day, while the nativity of our Lord disappears into a far distant memory. Santa will bring us a pair of unwanted socks, while God brings that wonderful gift of eternal salvation in the birth of Christ. There is no comparison. And yet, we anticipate the socks with full knowledge of their appearing, while eternal life through and the generosity of God and our Lord Jesus can slip to a very distant second place.

There is no suggestion that gifts should not be given at Christmas. They can bring great joy, and they can be a reminder of the love that we share here on earth. Giving gifts to others is a joy. At another level entirely, the gift of life that comes from God is spiritual and eternal, and it reminds us of how deep is the love that God has for us. It is a gift of life. Not only life, but life to the full; it is life for eternity.

Today, as we gaze at that manger, we recognise the love that God has for us, and we rejoice that God has sent Jesus to lead us into a new understanding of that divine relationship.

Jesus is God, and he has walked this life of ours. He was born to Mary, and he lived the life of a young child; as a young man; and as an adult. His greatest gift to us is his death and resurrection. We know that Jesus threw open the doors to the kingdom so that we might enter and stand before God the Father. Not only to stand before God, but to be welcomed as one reconciled, forgiven and embraced by God.

Today, as we gaze into that nativity scene with the tiny infant, we know that this is a very special birth of a very special child. In that perception we would be right. Jesus is a very special child, and it is a very special birth. However, it is much more than the birth of a child that we celebrate today.

As we gaze into that nativity scene we are not only rejoicing in the birth of a child. We are also rejoicing in the reality of God being present; in human form; on this earth. That tiny infant is God with us.

There can be no doubt that this is what the church has to do with Christmas. It is the celebration of God's divine presence walking among us. It is about God's Blessed Son bringing a new understanding of the glory of God.

When we read the prophecies of the Old Testament, we can recognise that the people of the time thought of God as being something of a benevolent dictator. God gives orders and the people obey. Sometimes they rebel against the authority of God, and as often as not they are punished.

Jesus helps us to recognise a beauty in the holiness of God that we see very little of in the Old Testament. He reveals God as a God of love and compassion. He shows us the way to heaven. He calls us to turn away from sin, and to seek a life of peace, hope, love, and reconciliation.

The God Jesus reveals to us is a God so committed to love for us that he sent his only Son to bring us into a divine relationship which is eternal.

When we see the Christmas pageant each year, let us look for the signs of love, compassion, and faith. Not to condemn anything that is not Christian, but rather to see the love of God as a part of our community.