

Jesus is born, Christmas is here, if you haven't quite got everything ready - it's too late now.

The conversation goes like this, imagine two people speaking:

“Are you ready for Christmas yet?”

“Well, almost, just got to get a few little things, y’know...and you”

“Oh the same, same”

And yet, we know full well from conversations like this that neither of those people are anywhere near ready for Christmas.

Christmas comes whether we are ready for it or not. I said to anyone that would listen this time around: this year can we have a year off Christmas. Can't it be every other year? Particularly as there's been so much happening this year, and last year.

We can't avoid Christmas - and we shouldn't really try to avoid it - Christmas will come no matter what the situation. Christmas has survived pandemics in the past, it'll survive this one. It's been celebrated and observed in times of war, depression, times of national crisis. Christmas even survived the banning of Christmas by the Puritans in the Commonwealth following the civil war. Christmas endures. Why is that?

There is, as we all know so well, so much more to Christmas than presents, Turkey dinners, merry-making, crackers, trees, decorations, the Christmas special of Strictly Come Dancing. All these things are of themselves great things, things we can and should enjoy. We all know, I'm sure, that Christmas is about the birth of Jesus, of God coming into the world in human form. It shows that God not only is alongside us, but is also one of us. We talk about Jesus as the light in the darkness, this is mentioned throughout the bible in both the old and new testament, the idea of God being a light, a beacon that shines out into our lives. As Isaiah writes ‘The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shone’.

It's nearly the end of 2021. I don't know about you, but I'm still processing 2020. These are strange times, dark times, times we find difficult to process. These have been testing times, testing for our families, our relationships, and our faith. There are storm clouds on the horizon: political storms, possibilities of conflict, the pandemic, Brexit, unrest on the streets. Two thousand and twenty-two years ago things were much the same. The way we lived would have been very different, but many of the things mentioned in the Christmas story: taxes, over-crowding, censuses, occupation by foreign armies, self-interested rulers, refugees - these are all things which remain in place somewhere in this world today.

That's fairly depressing. I don't want to put a downer on your Christmas, but we can't ignore these things. Equally, we can't ignore the positive things. These are hope, love, joy, and peace. If the birth of Jesus is about anything, then it's about these things: hope, love, joy, and peace. These are the things worth striving for in this life, they are the central pillars of the Christian faith, and beyond - you don't need to be a Christian, you don't need to have a faith, we just need to remain true to those things. Even if you only come to church once a year on Christmas day, even if you don't go to church at all - these are universal human goals. Hope, love, joy and peace - that's the light in the darkness, these are the things that can shine in our lives, and that we can shine on others.

Life is ups and downs, isn't it? You have to take the positive and negative, the rough with the smooth, good times with the bad times. We can no more escape the rollercoaster of life than we can avoid Christmas in fact. Ups and downs are part of human life and were before the Christian faith and will be long after we have all gone. At Christmas we stop all that for a moment and celebrate the birth of Jesus, and in celebrating Jesus, we also celebrate one another, we give thanks for one another, we give thanks for those close to us, those who bring us hope, love, joy, and peace. Those that bring the light in the darkness. Amen