

Christmas Talk

For each of the four Sundays of advent our theme began with a W:

Watch...Wait...Work...Worship....a time of preparation for the busyness of Christmas.

But have you ever thought when Christmas actually starts? For some, Christmas simply started today, with the giving and receiving of presents.

For most supermarket managers Christmas started in early October when their shelves started to fill with Christmas goodies, whilst for many traditionalists, Christmas starts when they decorate the tree, sing along at the Carol service or watch their loved ones in the nativity play.....(YouTube clip).

So, taking our cue from That Christmas let's look at the Christmas Story in a new, but not so new way. Not so new because I'm going to use four W's again... but this time they stand for What...Where...When and Why as told in the gospels.

The 'what' is straight forward; Matthew starts with Abraham and a string of 'begats' all the way up to the birth of Jesus Christ. The 'where' is so well known by you all...where? Yes, in a stable in Funchal. In fact, I suspect that Mark was so confused between Bethlehem and Funchal that he skipped that part and starts his gospel with John the Baptist baptising Jesus.

Luke gives us the 'when'...in the days of Caesar Augustus who issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world, and to be more specific, when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

But, the why...well that's more difficult...and John takes us right back to the opening verse of Genesis...Not, 'in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth', but 'in the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the word was God'.

Not to put too fine a point on it, that really sets the cat amongst the pigeons. Matthew tells that Jesus was present, well before Abraham, indeed at the very point of creation.

And that's one in the eye for Luke and Mark. No BC or AD if Jesus was there at creation, never mind BCE, or CE - Common Era. There certainly was nothing common about creation.

So, we must look to John if we want to know the why. But don't bother to google the question because if you do you'll get more than 10 million possible answers, many of which, I'm sure, give sound theological answers, but there are so many it becomes confusing....to bring eternal life....to fulfil the law....to seek and save the lost....to bring peace....to save sinners....etc. etc.

But the complexity and diversity of the answers really boil down to one letter. The letter L. It is the one letter which transforms the WORD into WORLD, which brings together God and the people of this earth.

You can almost imagine the scene with God the Father saying to Jesus "give 'em L". No I didn't drop my aitch....Give them L. Shorthand for love. Jesus came to remind folk that God is love and to show us how to love one another.

Or to quote from 1 John 4: 'He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us'.

The founder of the Cistercian order of monks Bernard Clairvaux, once said: Christ comes to us in three different ways.

Firstly, in Bethlehem at Christmas. Secondly, at the end of the age. And thirdly, in the lives of believers every single day.

Love is what John's gospel proclaims and a more recent John knew the importance of love:

Yes, all you need is love. The love that came into this world which we are celebrating today. It is in and through the love that we show, share, and shower others with, each and every day that answers the question not only affirms this but also answers the question: 'Why did Jesus come?'

Amen

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25 December 2024