

Just as kids shout 'Ready or not', when they're playing hide and seek, 'Ready or not', Christmas 2015 is here. I don't know about you, but ever year, I dream of a calm run up to Christmas, and my plan always fails, and I guess I'm not the only one. We feel that it won't be Christmas unless the presents are just what everyone wanted, there's plenty of food, the house is decorated a la Homes and Gardens and , we manage to post the parcels and Christmas cards on time. Etc. etc.

For so many people, by the time Christmas arrives they're sick to death of it. They just want to get it over and done with. They can't wait to get the decorations down and get back to normal. For others like Scrooge in Charles Dickens', 'Christmas Carol', the whole Christmas thing is a waste of time and a waste of money. When Scrooge's nephew comes to visit him and wish him a merry Christmas, his response is 'Bah, Humbug'.

People do struggle to believe in a loving God, when so many bad things happen in their lives. Like many of you I guess, for me, last year has been a series of ups and downs. Times of great joy and times of sadness. And we can look around the world, and see so many countries, torn apart by war or exhausted by famine. We fear the threats from Islamic extremists, on a daily basis and fear breeds hatred. The media is full of doom and gloom. So I, for one, am thankful for Christmas and its good news. It's not, that tonight we can forget the bad news, and the pain and sorrow, but we meet here tonight, to proclaim that bad news doesn't have the final say. That's the good news.

And it's not I who decided that tonight would be good news. Over 2000 years ago, an angel brought good news to some shepherds on a cold hillside, saying, 'Fear not, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be to all people.' So it's not just good news for the healthy, the wealthy and those who aren't going through any trials. It's good news for everyone. For you and me. In spite of what life can throw at us.

Good news comes from the word gospel. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each wrote an account of Jesus' life and death, in his own gospel. Each proclaiming the good news of the reconciliation of God with his people. Before the birth of Jesus, the Jews only had their Law, which required them to live in a way, which being human, they were unable to do. They would sacrifice an animal or bird, in the hope of obtaining forgiveness for their sins.

In fact, it was as if you went out and had a slap up meal, in a very expensive restaurant. But when it came to paying, for what you had eaten, you had no money to pay the bill and they wouldn't let you do the washing up. You knew what was owed but there was simply no way on earth, that you would be able to pay it.

But here we have the angel saying, 'Don't be afraid for I bring you good news of great joy. For unto you is born this day, in the City of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.'

So there we have it, someone who would be prepared to pay the price for our sin. Jesus, our Saviour. Earlier in the story, we have an angel coming to Mary and telling her, that although she was a Virgin, she would bear a Son, who would be the Son of the most High, in fact the Son of God. Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us.

While we, often give God the leftovers of our lives, He gave us his most treasured possession, his only Son. God was in Jesus, so in sending his Son, God came to earth, to live among us, to show us how to live our lives, his way, and finally, to die a sacrificial death for us, on the cross. He paid the price for our sins, reconciling us once again to himself, our loving and forgiving God. Then Jesus rose from the dead, conquering death for all of us, once and for all, and promising eternal life, for all who believe in him. Finally sending his Holy Spirit to guide and comfort us, and to lead us into all truth.

We shouldn't forget either, the angel's promise of peace on earth. That promise, would have excited the shepherds, who also lived in troubled times, when they heard the message of the Angels. Most of us are ordinary people too, called and challenged to be excited by that same promise and, like them, longing to see it fulfilled. So I pray that, this Christmas, we can all rediscover the excitement, not for tinsel and trimmings, but for the love, which surely did come down, that first Christmas.

That's the Good News of Christmas, but the birth of a baby in a stable is only the beginning.

My Guardian, my lovely uncle used to get irritated by the words of the old Christmas song, 'Man shall live for ever more, because of Christmas Day.' 'Not Christmas Day, Easter Day', he would shout at the radio. But maybe Johnny Mathis had a point. Without Christmas Day, there could be no Easter Day.

Now, as Max Bygraves used to say, I'd like to tell you a story. This story is by C. S. Lewis.

Once upon a Christmas Eve, a man sat in reflective silence, before the fireplace, pondering the meaning of Christmas. 'There's no point to a God who becomes man' he mused. 'Why would an all powerful God want to share even one of his precious moments with the likes of man? And even if he did, why would he choose to be born in an animal stall. No way! The whole thing's absurd. I'm sure if God wanted to come down to earth he would have chosen some other way'.

Suddenly, the man was roused from his reverie by a strange sound outside. He went to the window and saw a small gaggle of blue geese frantically honking and aimlessly flopping about in the snow. They seemed dazed and confused. Apparently, they had dropped out in exhaustion, from the flight formation of a larger flock, on its way from the Arctic islands, to the warmer climes of the Gully of Mexico.

Moved to compassion, the man tried to shoo the poor geese into his warm garage, but the more he shoed, the more they panicked. 'If they only realised, that I was only trying to do what's best for them,' he thought to himself. 'How can I make them understand my concern for their wellbeing'. Then the thought came to him 'If for just a minute, I could become one of them, an ordinary goose, and communicate with them in their own language, they would know what I'm trying to do'.

And suddenly, suddenly, he remembered Christmas, and a smile came over his face. Suddenly, the Christmas story no longer seemed absurd. Suddenly, he pictured that ordinary looking infant lying in a manger, in that stable in Bethlehem, and he knew the answer to his Christmas problem. God had become one of us, to tell us that he loves us.

I've spoken to you....