SOME THOUGHTS ON CHRISTMAS SERVICES

Posted on December 13, 2021 by Eddie

A dog is for life, not just for Christmas. And Christmas services are the same; they need to be part of a long-term, thought through process of explaining the gospel, not something that we forget about on Boxing Day.
Category: Observations

You may have noticed that we are approaching Christmas. It turns up around this time every year. The important thing to remember is that, whatever its origins, Christmas is essentially a secular festival for British society. It's a way to cheer ourselves up in the depths of winter, through spending money, getting together with friends and family, eating and drinking and giving presents.

However, there are vestiges of religious traditions still present in many peoples' minds, so churches spend a lot of time and effort into organising services and events which will attract people who don't go to church, with the aim of explaining the gospel to them. I think that this is a good and wise thing to do - to be honest, it's a bit of a no brainer.

That being said, I think we need to consider where our society is in order to fine tune what it is that we seek to do at Christmas and what we seek to achieve.

We have to remember that Britain is an overwhelmingly secular country, with most people having a limited understanding of the Christian story or what the religion is all about. If they have any view of the Christian faith it is likely to be something rooted in sentiment and seen as rather old-fashioned, or (increasingly) they may be actively hostile to a faith that they see to be opposed to modern, enlightened values. In this context, it is extremely unlikely that people will become Christians on their first exposure to the gospel. It can happen and it does happen, but such "instant conversions" are rare. Even then, those who become Christians on quickly, will often be found to have a background which included contact with believers in the past.

Becoming a Christian is a process which takes time and people may need multiple, long term contacts with the church before they make that step. This means, that we need to think in terms welcoming and interesting people in such a way that they will return to the church in January or February. Preaching a 20 minute sermon which gives a full explanation of the gospel, won't help if it alienates people and leaves them uninterested. A short talk, which is intriguing and leaving people with questions, might seem less satisfying, but in the end it is likely to accomplish far more.

People like a bit of tradition at Christmas, so make sure that there are some familiar carols for them to sing and this is the one time of the year when I'd suggest that it might be appropriate to read from the AV, rather than a modern translation. You can always explain what the reading actually mean, if need be.

The thing is, we are in a missionary situation in the UK and we don't always realise it. This means that

evangelism needs to be viewed as a long term effort, not as a series of one-off events. We need to follow up our Christmas services with other, friendly accessible stuff that people will be attracted to. We also need to ensure that the life of the church demonstrates the truth of the message that we are proclaiming, both in terms of our community life but also in the way in which we serve the wider society around us.

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