WHAT'S CHRISTMAS ALL ABOUT?

Posted on December 23, 2014 by Eddie

The Word, God in human form made his home with people like us. The original says â€˜he pitched his tent among usâ€™, and in modern terms, you could almost say, â€˜he rented a flat in our streetâ€™. God came to live where we live and to live a human life. Now this wasnâ€™t like one of those reality TV experiments where a rich person goes to live among poor people for a week, before returning home to their comfortable life and vowing to be more generous. Jesus was in it for the long haul.
Category: Observations

- Have you finished your shopping?
- Started boiling your sprouts?
- Made arrangements for feeding your family or travelling to see them?
- Have you decorated the house?

Of course, at a carol service, Iâ€™m supposed to say that this isnâ€™t what Christmas is all about.

Except that, in a way, it is. The timing and many of the traditions that surround our Christmas celebrations come from before Christianity and were part of a mid-winter festival. There is nothing wrong with getting together with friends and families, eating good food and giving each other gifts. Itâ€™s an excellent thing to do at this time of year when everything is cold and dark and there are still two more months of winter to go!

I hope you have a great Christmas.

But, of course, there is more to Christmas than a simple mid-winter festival.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOByXwK-g94

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT A BABY

Christmas is also about the birth of a baby. This wasnâ€™t just any baby; every person who has ever lived started off as a baby and the whole world doesnâ€™t shut down to celebrate everyoneâ€™s birthday.

This was a particular baby, born over two thousand years ago in the town of Bethlehem. You probably know the story and weâ€™ve heard some of it this evening. The baby was called Jesus and he is the most famous person that the world has ever seen.

He was never a rich man, never wrote a book, never commanded an army or ran a country, but over 2,000 years, his words have had an impact on billions of people.

In the Christian Bible there are four stories of Jesus life, told by four of his friends, each of whom focuses on the aspects that impact them most. Two of the biographers, Matthew and Luke tell the familiar Christmas story with shepherds, angels and wise men. John, however, doesnâ€™t tell us what happened, he tells us what it means.

Iâ€™m not going to read a long passage, just a couple of sentences. John talks about someone he calls â€˜the Wordâ€™. It is clear that this â€˜Wordâ€™ is actually God himself and then he goes on to say:

> *So the Word became humanÂ and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love*

> *and faithfulness.Â And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Fatherâ€™s one and only Son.*
>
> *John 1:14*

Iâ€™d just like to highlight three things:

The Word became human

Christians believe that the baby Jesus, who we talk about at Christmas, was actually God in human form. God wrapped himself in a human body and was born as a human being and lived a human life.

He made his home among us

The Word, God in human form made his home with people like us. The original says â€˜he pitched his tent among usâ€™, and in modern terms, you could almost say, â€˜he rented a flat in our streetâ€™. God came to live where we live and to live a human life.

Now this wasnâ€™t like one of those reality TV experiments where a rich person goes to live among poor people for a week, before returning home to their comfortable life and vowing to be more generous. Jesus was in it for the long haul:

- He was born to an unmarried mother
- Early in life he became a political refugee
- Religious fanatics tried to stone him to death (and eventually managed to have him killed)
- He suffered tiredness and stress from his work
- He was homeless
- He was arrested and tried on false charges and executed illegally

God, Jesus, went through the worst that can be thrown at any person, but:

He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness

He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness.Â And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Fatherâ€™s one and only Son.

Despite everything that happened to him, Jesus was unfailingly kind and faithfully served God and helped people. When you look at his life, you see what God is like.

So What?

So, what is the point of all of this? Is it anything more than just a nice story?

Well, I think it is incredibly important. One of the questions that people often ask, is where is God when things go horribly wrong?

- When I am lonely?
- When Iâ€™m running out of money?
- When Iâ€™m too stressed?

Where is God in the face of religious extremism, materialism and the fact that life is sometimes just rotten?

The answer that Christmas gives us, is that God is right there in the middle of it. He has been lonely, poor, stressed. He has faced religious extremism and all of the other rubbish that life throws at us.

He is there and he cares for you. He knows how you feel and wants to hold your hand through the difficulties of life. But the baby who was born in a poor lodging house in Bethlehem will not force himself upon you. Thatâ€™s not his way. Christmas tells us that we have a God who cares deeply for people and wants the best for them, but we have to invite him to be part of our lives. If we keep him at a distance, he will stay there.

I hope you have a brilliant Christmas; lots of fun, good food and the odd glass of wine. If you friends and family are around, I hope you have a great time with them â€“ no arguments, no tired, weepy children (or parents). I hope you have an absolute blast.

But I also hope that you take time to invite God, the baby in the manger, to be a part of your life for Christmas and the rest of your life.

Happy Christmas!

This is more or less the text of my talk at the Exilio Southampton Christmas Carol Service.