CHRISTMAS: WHY THE BIG FUSS?

Posted on December 14, 2015 by Eddie

I don't think that we can justify the attention that we pay to this time of the year from Scripture. There are many other events which are more central to the four Gospels than the Christmas story.
Category: Observations

Well, Christmas is almost upon us.Â It's time for the various last-minute panics about food shopping, present buying and card sending that make this such a wonderful reflective time of the year.

Of course, it is important to celebrate Christmas because it is one of the key cultural festivals of our society and more importantly (for this blog) it's a Christian event. But just how central is the Christmas story to the Bible? You don't have to spend too long looking at the Gospels to realise that the Christmas story is not really centre stage. Let's list some of the key events that form the narrative of Christmas as it is usually told:

- *The angel announces Jesus birth to Mary*: Luke
- *The angel announces Jesus birth to Joseph*: Matthew
- *John the Baptist's birth*: Luke
- *The census*: Luke
- *The journey to Bethlehem*: Luke, Matthew (by implication)
- *No room in the inn*: Luke
- *The manger*: Luke
- *The shepherds*: Luke
- *The Star*: Matthew
- *The wise men*: Matthew

So, of the four Gospels, two of them don't mention the Christmas story at all and, apart from the place of Jesus birth and the fact that he was born during the reign of Herod, the other two Gospels don't include the same details. The fact that Matthew and Luke don't include the same events isn't a problem, they each have their particular focus and probably used different sources for their information; this is what happens when two people write about the same event (it is fair to point out that details such as the name of Jesus' parents are common to both Luke and Matthew).

Two of the Gospels more or less ignore the Christmas story altogether and the other two only tell half the story. Not only that, but we are so distanced from the original events in time and space that we tend to misread the familiar words anyway.

So where am I going with all this?

Firstly, I don't think that we can justify the attention that we pay to this time of the year from Scripture. There are many other events which are more central to the four Gospels than the Christmas story.

However, as I said above, this is a key cultural event for our society and because of that, it provides a wonderful opportunity to talk about Jesus and to get the Christian faith on the national agenda. However, I think we need to think of this in missional terms; how do we use the opportunities of this season to present the reality of the Christian faith to a world that is busy buying presents and cooking turkeys?

Too often, the Christian response is to insist that we have to put "Christ back into Christmas". Pointing us back to some mythical time in the past when the celebration revolved around Jesus. If that time ever existed (and I'm far from convinced it did), it was in a society very different to our own and the solutions from those days are not the right ones for today.

I'm not sure what the answers are, but I have a sneaking feeling that the Gospels have got it right. They spend hardly anytime talking about "the baby Jesus". Somehow, we have to move from the sentimentality of the traditional Christmas story to the gritty reality of God become man and challenging our fundamental way of life.