

Matthew 2.1-12

Jesus is for life, not just for Christmas

Amington Church

Sunday 16 December 2018

Carols by Candlelight

The Nativity

I wonder what guided you to this church, this evening? Maybe it was our parish Christmas card. Maybe it was a post on Facebook. Maybe it was a friend who invited you – I don't know – I suspect it wasn't a star – the UK is too cloudy for that mode of navigation.

But whatever guided you here – I wonder what you expect to find? We know what the wise men expected to find, because they turned up at a palace – they were expecting the 'king of the Jews' to be surrounded by wealth and servants. I imagine they were surprised when they found Jesus lying in a feeding-trough for animals.

Pause

Something like a billion Christmas cards will be sent this year in the UK – and some of them will have a nativity scene on the front. You know the ones...

There's a stable with a star shining above it, the baby Jesus lying in a manger, with Mary and Joseph kneeling either side. There is a gaggle of shepherds on one side, holding a lamb or two, and three kings on the other side, kneeling and holding out gifts. If you're lucky there might even be an angel or two in the sky, singing or playing trumpets. And of course we have Mary's donkey and the kings' camels – and maybe a couple of oxen.

Am I right? Do you recognise that scene? It's just a shame it isn't true, that it never happened. At least, it didn't happen like *that*.

First of all, in the Bible there's no mention of a stable, or a donkey, or camels. Second, the shepherds and the angels were there – but there weren't 'three kings'. For starters, they weren't kings, but more importantly they came much later – about two *years* after Jesus was born – and the Bible doesn't say how many there were, only that they had three gifts.

Now, before you call the paper to complain the vicar is ruining the wonder of Christmas – there's nothing wrong with nativity scenes – we own one. There's nothing wrong with sending cards with one of those nativity scenes on – I've sent dozens this year. There's nothing wrong with singing carols that poetically imagine the Christmas story – we've been singing several tonight.

There's nothing wrong with this romanticised view of Jesus' birth – *as long as we realise that's what it is*. It's great to be filled with wonder at Christmas, to dress children up for school nativities, to enjoy the beauty of art – *as long as we don't lose sight of Jesus*.

This is more than a fairytale, more than a child's bedtime story, more than a school play; behind it all lies Jesus the Son of God, the one who was, 'born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth'.

Jesus is for Life

Picture that nativity scene I just described. Now rub out the wise men and their camels. Rub out the shepherds and their lambs. Rub out the angels singing in the sky. Rub out the stable, rub out even Mary and Joseph – until all you're left with is a star in the sky shining down on Jesus, lying in the manger.

The star wasn't shining on the stable, on *anything*, on *anyone*, except *Jesus*. The wise men followed the star, not so they could be in a Christmas card, but because they wanted to see *Jesus*. He is the one that matters.

It's nice and easy to keep the 'sweet little baby Jesus' in his manger, literally packed away in a box up in the loft to be brought out at Christmas time.

But Jesus is for life, not just for Christmas.

Jesus is the most wonderful, the most beautiful, the most precious gift God could ever have given us: his own Son, come to live with us, as one of us.

Now I don't know what kind of Christmas you are planning. Maybe it's going to be like the nativity scene I described, with so much going on it's easy to ignore the most important person of all. If that's you, please can I encourage you to make space for Jesus. That doesn't mean ignoring your friends and family, but making sure all that doesn't squeeze out the most important person of all.

For if you want him to, he will transform not only your Christmas but your life as well – because he came so that we – that's you and me – might have life: **Jesus is for life, not just for Christmas.**

So although my prayer is that we might all make space for Jesus this Christmas, actually my *main* prayer is that we might all make space for Jesus *in January*, and learn to walk with him, in the new and wonderful life he promises to all who believe in him.