

God came to us. John 1:14

Christmas Family Service - Sunday, 18th December, 2011

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

There are a lot of ingredients that we put into the recipe of Christmas.

There are loads and loads of things that happen at Christmas; some of them are good, some not so good.

Some things are materialistic:

By this, I don't mean they're necessarily wrong – but they are about “stuff”

- Getting stuff – presents, writing Christmas lists, Christmas shopping
- Having a good time - office Christmas parties
- Eating too much – turkey, sprouts, Christmas pudding
- Drinking - Mulled wine
- Entertainment – TV

Some things are not so good:

- Loneliness
- Depression
- Debt
- Pressure from advertising – “The perfect Christmas”
- Family break-up

Some things we have ‘borrowed’ from pagan times:

- Kissing under mistletoe
- The date – 25th December was borrowed from a Roman festival – Jesus probably wasn't born in December
- Christmas trees
- Holly

Some things are tradition:

- Christmas songs
- Santa
- Candles
- Visiting family
- Christmas decorations
- Hanging up stockings
- We have our own family 'traditions' – meal together, watch the Muppets Christmas Carol!
- Swimming in the sea on Christmas Day!
- Christmas songs

The most important part of Christmas is the Spiritual part:

- Prophecy – Isaiah and others had prophesied glimpses of God's Rescue plan 800 years before Jesus was born – the place – Bethlehem; the circumstances – "A virgin will be with child"
- Jesus' lineage – very important lists of Jesus' family tree in Matthew and Luke, showing that Jesus was descended from king David and was therefore fulfilling God's Promise
- The Star
- The Magi and shepherds
- Anna and Nathaniel – two old, godly people who were waiting in the Temple believing that one day they would see the Messiah
- Angels
- The circumstances of His birth – the manger.

I'm not saying these things are bad (except the bad ones!) but I think we need to realise that all of these things (even some of the 'spiritual' details) can cover and distract us from the most important thing.

There's so much that is involved in the way that we celebrate Christmas – especially in Europe, that it might take days to explain it all to someone who had never heard of it before.

We throw so many things into the recipe of what makes Christmas that it all gets mixed into a vague, cinnamon-flavoured mush!

If that's the case, then what I'm going to say now is the essence – the true heart of Christmas; and it's this:

God came to us!

Everyone repeat

If you forget everything else about Christmas, remember this!

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" – which means, "God with us." (Matthew 1:22-23)

Immanuel – God with us.

This isn't the story of us trying to get to God;

I saw a bumper sticker that says "Wise men still seek Jesus", but actually this isn't the story of us seeking God; it is the account of God, The Creator, putting on flesh – becoming a man (the technical language is becoming God Incarnate) in order to seek and rescue us.

We sing the carol "Hark the herald angels sing" which has the line:

"He came down to Earth from Heaven..."

That's the truth. It wasn't about us getting good enough to sneak into Heaven;

Church: if you think coming to church (whether for your Christmas fix or every week of your life)

Giving: or putting money in the offering box, or caring for the homeless or buying generous presents for people

Goodness: or being extra nice to your neighbours or anything else you could do, is enough to make God say "Go on then, I'll let you in!" then you have misunderstood Christmas.

It was while we were lost, in darkness that the Light shone

It was when we were stuck in a pit, with no way out, that God came – in Person – Immanuel, to lift us out.

In 1897, the coal seam under Old Park Road in Wednesbury (next to Carcraft) caught fire and the whole street collapsed – it burned for more than a year.

A night watchman called Mr Hodgkiss fell into the burning pit – and then a policeman called Richard Goldby climbed down into the 15ft deep hole to rescue him.

That's what we're remembering at Christmas – only God went further!

Jesus – in very nature God came down to us!

Humbled Himself

Made Himself nothing – a 'nobody' born in a poor town in Palestine – not rich or from an influential family

Came to be a servant

The Glory of God the Creator – constrained in a human body

Perfectly obedient to His Heavenly Father – He was obedient even to a horrible, lonely, humiliating death on a cross.

And at the point of His Death the curtain in the Temple that kept people separate from the Most Holy Place was torn in two – **from top to bottom** – This was God coming to man; not man reaching God!

This was an invitation – it was God saying I've come to you, so now you can come to Me! – I've taken away the barrier – I've made a way!

The passage in Philippians 2 goes on to say that now He has been raised and exalted and given the Name above every other name.

And His Mission is that every nation – all of us, will know His Goodness and His Salvation and His Love; that we don't need to be separate from God, living in the darkness, stuck in the pit any more – but that we can know that Jesus is still Immanuel – He has come to us

Jesus is still God with us! – so we can still come to Him!