

From Fr Simon

Dear all

We need to get back to the real meaning of Christmas.

Somehow Christmas has been taken over by so much else, and we can lose its real meaning beneath it all. So let's get back to the real meaning...

Let's start with the story. Surely the trip to Bethlehem on the donkey is part of the real meaning? Well, to be honest there is no donkey mentioned in the bible story. Maybe we should get rid of the donkey?

How about the stable? The stable must be part of the real meaning of Christmas because we know the star stopped over the stable where Jesus was born, and the shepherds and wise men visited. But there's a problem with the stable – like the donkey it's not in the bible story. Should we get rid of the stable?

How about the slaughter of innocents – this is where Herod the Great ordered all the local children to be killed, because he wanted to kill Jesus. Well, this is in the bible so this is part of the real meaning, but we don't usually want to talk about this too much – it's not very Christmassy. Is this a bit of the real meaning we should keep quiet about?

Maybe we need to stop our feasting, drinking and partying at Christmas? Except the bible is full of celebrations on earth and in heaven. Even when the wedding guests had drunk everything, Jesus did not tell them to stop – he made some more booze (barrel loads) so they could carry on. The bible seems to say that it is good to celebrate great things, and to celebrate wildly.

Maybe we need to cut down on our present buying? Except the Wise Men gave very extravagant gifts to Jesus, and of course Jesus is God's own extravagant gift to the whole world. So it's quite biblical to give to each other, it reflects God's own generous nature.

Maybe Christmas should be about families. This year we are especially aware of missing families because of Coronavirus. But, the bible tells us that Mary and Joseph left their families to travel to Bethlehem – it was just them (until Jesus was born). Then later, the Holy Family became refugees as they fled persecution to find safety in Egypt. Is the real meaning of Christmas in welcoming refugees at the expense of our wider families?

Maybe the real meaning of Christmas is to go to church? Except church hadn't been invented when Jesus was born. In fact the word Christmas is not in the bible. And Jesus probably wasn't born on 25th December anyway!

If you hadn't guessed by now, I don't like the phrase, "the real meaning of Christmas".

Everyone has a different idea about the real meaning of Christmas; your real meaning of Christmas will be slightly (or very) different from other people's and will still be valid and Godly. In fact the 4 Gospels all give a very different account of the Christmas story and its meaning, so we are in good company. I once preached at midnight mass on the gospel of John and someone complained to the Bishop that I had not preached on the real meaning of Christmas because I had not mentioned the baby (the baby Jesus is not in John's Gospel, but a great deal of other meaning is).

Also, when we talk of the real meaning of Christmas it often seems a bit grumbly or superior, it's a bit like saying my meaning of Christmas is the real one, so yours isn't.

The meaning of Christmas is so rich and deep and varied that none of us could sum it all up exclusively.

But I do agree that we can lose sight of the meaning of Christmas beneath all the decorations. We do need to remember why we are celebrating, why we are giving, why we are eating, drinking, visiting (if we're allowed), whilst not telling everyone else they've got it wrong.

In my mind a large part of Christmas is that God gives himself into the world in an astonishing act of self-emptying.

This gives me cause to celebrate with great abandon, because God gives himself to us with even greater abandon and even less restraint; born to set us and the whole world free.

And I think the odd donkey, stable, bearded man dressed in red, and countless other traditions are all part of celebrating with the angels that Christ is born – whatever that means.

God bless

Notices Things may change due to Coronavirus.

December:

Follow the Village Advent Window trails in both villages. Every day in December the next display will be revealed. On 24th December why not do the whole trail from beginning to end?

Sunday 6th 9.30am Golcar. Blessing of the shoe boxes

Friday 18th 7pm Longwood. Carols by Candlelight (admission by ticket, and live-streamed)

Sunday 20th 9.30am Golcar. Christingle. During the service we will construct our own Christingles – whether you are in church or joining via the live-stream. Kits will be available to collect the week before.

Thursday 24th Christmas Eve.

Golcar afternoon/evening family nativity. No details yet.

6pm Longwood Christingle

7pm Golcar, Carols by Candlelight (admission by ticket, and live-streamed)

11pm Golcar, Midnight Mass

Friday 25th Christmas Day.

8am Golcar quiet service of Holy Communion with traditional words

9.30am Golcar, Sung Holy Communion

11am Longwood, Sung Holy Communion

Sunday 27th No service in Golcar, instead please come to:

11am Longwood, sung Holy Communion

January:

We will be running a bible study course going through the whole bible in 8 sessions. Why not make it your New Year's Resolution to do it?