

Christmas Eve: 24th December 2016

If you were able to organise your ideal Christmas, what would you include in it? I suspect you would probably include many of your family traditions from childhood along with, some new traditions inherited from other family and friends. One of things about living with someone else, is adapting to other people's traditions. For example, when do you put the tree up? How close to Christmas? When do you open your presents - before or after the meal? If you are a child, that's tough! Having to wait till the afternoon. Do you go out for Christmas lunch, or have a family gathering at home?

There are some strange Christmas traditions from around the world. In South Africa a delicacy eaten on Christmas day, is deep fried caterpillar of the emperor moth! In Japan, due to an advertising campaign in 1974, many families have a KFC on Christmas eve. There are other fast food outlets available! Germans hide a pickle in the Christmas tree on Christmas eve and the first child to find it get a gift. In Slovakia the senior man of the family takes a spoonful of traditional pudding and throw it at the ceiling. The more that sticks, the better. Our Christmas traditions, in some way, reflect what we think Christmas is all about.

What about our mental image of Christmas? I wonder if we have in our minds that idealised Christmas card scene, of carollers around the village Christmas tree, unbroken snow covering the fields, it is peaceful and serene; chestnuts roasting on an open fire. Our images can be far from reality, but they are important, because they say something about what Christmas mean to us.

Take the nativity scene, acted out on church chancels and school halls throughout the land. It is a childhood image of God's dramatic intervention into the world that we find difficult to let go. I suspect that the birth of Jesus was far more messy than that! Mary could have been as young as 12 and Joseph, the older dad, trying to cope with an embarrassing situation, and they end their journey, holed up, of all places, in a cattle shed.

The nativity shepherds may have changed from tea towels, as in my day, to bespoke costumes, but their job, as it was in Jesus day, was still as dirty, dangerous and low in the pecking order. Yet God's messengers, even did not have wings, pay these guys a visit, not the powerful of the land. The shepherds were the first to hear the story of the birth of Jesus. Of God's message, for everyone.

I remember as an adult, being one of the Magi in a church nativity play. We were all dressed up, and we with somewhere to go. To follow the star and bring our gifts. And what better tradition do we have, of sharing gifts. Maybe it is only as we get older that we appreciate giving, as least as important as receiving. Do you not like to see people's reaction? Have we got it right? The nativity of God is the gift of Jesus to the world. I have this image of God watching us, with interest, and noting our reaction to his gift.

I wonder if we can create for ourselves, some new Christmas traditions and change our mental image of Christmas. This ancient story, celebrates that God's love is for all. Amen.