

Morningside Sermon 10.00am 25/12/24

Christmas Day

Beginning

Isaiah 52:7-10; John 1:1-14

When does Christmas begin?

For some it begins in September or October. Shops start tinselling, office parties start booking, people start saying, 'We're going to my parents this year, last year we went to his.' But none of these is the beginning of Christmas.

Maybe Christmas begins in December. That's when there are carol services and concerts, and mince pies, and a resolution to make more of an effort to send cards early this year, having donated a kidney to pay for the stamps, and to rescue crushed old tree decorations and lights where one goes out and they all go out. But December isn't the beginning of Christmas.

So when does Christmas begin?

Maybe it's when you hold a gift on your lap and you genuinely don't know what's inside but you expect you're going to like it. Or maybe it's when the oven door opens and a golden-topped turkey/pheasant/duck/guinea fowl/nut roast emerges, laden with stuffing and kilned mini-chocolatas emerges. Or the respectful silence at 3pm when the Monarch speaks live to the nation about the year's struggles and consolations.

Maybe Christmas begins with worship. After all angels from the realms of glory came to tell tidings of comfort and joy, shepherds with their flocks abiding left to visit the infant king, three kings came from Persian lands afar. Ox and ass and sheep knelt down. Mary and Joseph adored and worshipped. But even worship on its own is not when Christmas begins.

So when does Christmas begin? Even with all the possibilities I've mentioned we're reluctant to commit ourselves to when Christmas begins. We sweep the hand and say, 'It's all of it.' But if it's all of it, does that mean also the awkward parts: the colleague at work you feel you should be kind to but just thinking about it brings to the surface all the anger and irritation of a year of undeclared war; the post-dinner washing up that no one feels in the mood to do; the eagerness to close the door on anything and anyone that might seem cold, or need, or sad, or alone in an impulse to don the Christmas sweater and be hearty, warm and ready to refill the glass for another drink?

Here's the paradox of Christmas. We aren't really sure when Christmas begins, so to hide our anxiety we tend to crowd the season with celebration, half-finished conversations and rapidly purchased, less than suitable presents, as if the festive season were an overfully Christmas stocking packed with trinkets, lest we ever look closely enough at any of them to wonder if they're of any real value.

In John's gospel, in that magnificent prologue, where there is no mention of stars or shepherds, angels or wise men, mangers or anything we have the rolling open words, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God..."*

The move from Christmas Eve to Christmas Day is stunning. We move from pondering the human arrival of the Messiah, who was born to a poor, unwed mother, and a village carpenter, and laid in a manger because there was no room in the inn. We move to the immense reality that the child born in Bethlehem is the Word of God, one with God, Who brought, and still brings light and life into our world, from the beginning.

The poetry of John's Gospel moves us from 'birth' to 'incarnation'. This is a vast canvas for faith to be painted upon. It encompasses, 'the beginning' and includes identity with God and the mysterious work of Creation.

Christmas begins when we grapple with the idea that the Christ-Child is God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God. In the beginning God's Word, Jesus, conveys God's thinking, God's speaking, God's action and God's purpose. The Word, Jesus, reveals God so that we, if we care to look, and wonder, might encounter the gift that is Jesus, received today, again. Immanuel, God with us.

That word, 'with', is the most important in the Bible. God no longer distant, but present. God no longer remote, but close by. God no longer absent, but **with** us. With you; with me.

Welcome that into your lives, and Christmas has begun for you.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen