

A few words from the Vicarage ...



As I write this in mid-December, I am being constantly told that this is *my busiest time of the year!* Whilst it is certainly busy, it has to be said that it is not much less busy throughout the year - Advent and the approach to Christmas is simply a different form of busyness. Perhaps it is the perception that the church has a greater part to play in everyone's lives that the Vicar is suddenly more visible and more prominent than at other times - and so appears to be *busier!*

In the midst of all this busyness, as we were enjoying the festive 'extras' with carol singing, our Christingle Café, Lessons & Carols, Crib Service and Midnight Mass, I was contacted by the local weekly newspaper, the Lytham St Annes Express - to which I contribute regular articles under their *Wayside Pulpit* feature - if I would like to write a piece on the '*true meaning of Christmas*'. As this invitation included all the *Waysider* regular contributors, a restriction of 150 words was imposed.

My initial reaction was somewhat muted - after all, it was *my busiest time of the year* and this was an unplanned added extra. My next reaction was how to summarise the *true meaning of Christmas* in 150 words - such a task felt a bit like trying to put God in a box.

However, I set to the challenge, considering it from several angles - looking at possible headings such as the '*journey from the cradle to the cross*'; or '*Christmas begins with Christ*'. Then I reflected upon the content of our Christian Aid-inspired Advent study group course which made a connection between Mary's journey to Bethlehem and our own Advent journey, preparing to meet the Christ child afresh at Christmas. In making this connection, we recognise the difference between the 'reality' and the 'meaning' and I now offer here what was submitted to the newspaper as my interpretation as to the '*true meaning of Christmas*'.

'A huge gulf lies between the '*reality*' and '*meaning*' of Christmas.

'The '*reality*' lies not in tinsel and carols, but in a traumatic donkey ride for a frightened, pregnant teenager and her fiancé, ending when she gave birth, surrounded by animals, in a mucky, malodorous stable. Not quite the picture conjured up by modern nativity scenes.

'The '*meaning*', however, is quite different - witnessed by God's arrival in human flesh to experience the reality of his created humanity. It is through that experience we can have confidence in his love, care and compassion.

'Without Christmas, there would be no Easter; without Easter, there would be no cross of Calvary, no redemptive victory over sin and death, and no salvation for humankind. Without all of that, there would be no life and no hope, simply an empty existence. Christmas is but the beginning of our journey of faith and eternal salvation.'

With all best wishes to you all from the Vicarage for 2015.

God bless you,
your Vicar,
Fr D.