

Presence, not Presents

“Christmas is coming, the geese are getting fat...” I am sure you remember the rhyme and you don’t need reminding that Christmas draws ever nearer. Are you ready? Tree up and decorated; food bought; relatives and friends invited; freezer full of canapés, sausage rolls and mince pies? Brussels sprouts simmering away gently? All the presents bought—and have you remembered the batteries to make them go? So many Christmas surprises have been ruined by the lack of those AAA batteries, haven’t they?

December is such a busy time you can’t remember everything no matter how many lists you write or how organised you (think you) are. But somewhere, between preparing meals, making costumes for nativity plays at school, remembering to post cards and presents by the correct days, we really do need to STOP, SIT DOWN and remind ourselves why we are doing all this. It is Christmas—we are celebrating the birth over two thousand years ago of a baby—a baby who was in fact God. A miracle; as indeed every birth is. And we can give ourselves permission to stop the merry-go-round that we are on and think about that amazing story once again. To think about the Creator God who sent his Son into this dark world in order to bring light to the darkness and order to the chaos of our lives and our world.

Many children will wake up excitedly on Christmas morning to open presents that have maybe cost a great deal of money. Other children may not be as fortunate. It is probably well to remember that ‘money can’t buy me love,’ as the Beatles sang. Happy memories don’t always rely on beautiful gifts, but on relationships: on families and friends spending time together to share stories, laughter, love. These are good gifts to give and to receive.

Indeed, the greatest gift ever given does not need batteries, or overnight charging; it will not rust or break or wear out. We are never too young or too old to accept it; we will never outgrow it. It does not cost us a penny and it does not need feeding—it just needs love. You don’t need to spend money on it because it is free. Freely given, and you are equally free to accept it, or to refuse it. The greatest gift ever given is, of course, Jesus Christ. The baby born in Bethlehem who was destined to be the Light of the World, and to die and rise again in order to save us from ourselves. Jesus came to have a relationship with us—he does not want expensive toys—like us, he needs love and he is willing to give us love in bucketloads. He wants to spend time with each of us; he wants our presence, not our presents.

Perhaps this year we need to think about giving our time to others, to consider extra donations to the Food Banks (each church in the Benefice will be pleased to receive your gifts), to spend more on the refugees and homeless than on ourselves. Our presence rather than our presents.

Why not come and spend some time with us in one or more of our services throughout December— give God your presence this year. Our Christmas services are listed in this Chronicle, and we look forward to seeing you.

With blessings, Rev Glynis Beckett