

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

*Matthew 1.21.*

We went up to Edinburgh on the train last week. On the way back we treated ourselves to a copy of *Country Life*. (It was in *Country Life*, by the way, that I discovered that according to the Holy Days and Fasting Act of 1551 which is still on the State Book it is compulsory to attend church on Christmas Day). I like *Country Life*. There's no filth in it or tawdry celebrity trash, just beautiful buildings, beautiful works of art, and, of course, girls in pearls. There was a lovely article all about Unsung Heroes of our rural churches, recognised by the Abp of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace. (You might be interested to know that the winner, John Fall, comes from North Yorkshire).

These were the pleasures which helped me to round off our day, as we hurtled back to York. But imagine my delight when I saw that the whole editorial had been given over to the Bp of Exeter and was entitled 'The true meaning of Christmas'. My pleasure was in the fact that a prestigious secular magazine was clearly still prepared to ask a leading member of the Church to provide an editorial. I really am not convinced that our nation is as secular as the liberal elite keep saying.

So I began the bishop's full page editorial. But when I got to the end, I felt there was something missing. What was it? So I went back and read it again. And then it struck me: nowhere in the full-page article had the Bishop mentioned the name of Jesus, Incredible! How can you be a bishop of the church, and write a whole article about the *true* meaning of

Christmas and not mention the name of Jesus? Now, to be fair, he *did* mention 'the child:

*If you want to know what God is like, you just have to look into that crib and see a child called Emmanuel.*

Very true, and the bishop did conclude with these words:

*At its heart, Christmas centres on the account of a mother and her baby, and all that goes with it - the Angel Gabriel, Joseph, the journey, the birth, the manger, the angels, the shepherds and the Magi. All play their part in the drama - a drama that is also ours as we hear the account of how God sends His Son into the world because he loves us and wants to reach out to us.*

Again, all very true, but why not mention his name?

Extraordinary, isn't it? Have we become so subverted by the ideology of 'inclusiveness', 'equality' and human rights, that to mention Jesus might exclude or offend someone? Even the Koran mentions Jesus!

Earlier in the week, the Mansfield College magazine arrived. In it was an article by the new chaplain about her work. This is how she describes her role:

*Basically, my goal is to nurture meaningful community - to facilitate opportunities to individuals and groups to discover, reflect, talk about and engage in the things that produce value, meaning, joy, enrichment, generosity of spirit, and purpose in life. I hope to contribute to the ability of others to engage a sense of the sacred, to connect with and grow in their awareness or understanding of the divine.*

Again, terrific stuff; no-one's going to object to that (except the awful 'management-speak'!) But, if you are a Christian minister who claims to follow Jesus Christ, why not mention his name? Why speak only in vague abstractions like 'the sacred', 'the divine'? And is a Christian chaplain's role *only* to create a sense of community and togetherness? We have all manner of community and cohesion officers on our local

councils to do that. What about chaplains telling others about Jesus? Why are we Christians so frightened to name his name?

I've said before that the word 'Christianity' does not occur in the Bible. The Bible does not talk about abstractions like 'the divine', the 'sacred' or 'community'. The Bible talks about specifics, about *people*. It is stuffed full of people's *names*. The *community* has a name; it's called *Israel*. God is known in the face of a specific person, Jesus, who was born in a specific place, Bethlehem, at a specific time 2000 years ago.

We are not being asked to sign up to some abstract -ism or ideology. We are each called to follow a specific person whose name was Jesus. All those who follow him join a new community called the church, the new Israel.

Today, this Christmas Day, we acknowledge with thanks and adoration that God made himself known in a specific person called Jesus. Look into his face, and you see God.

Soon we shall making New Year's resolutions. No doubt we shall break them within days, but may I suggest a few?

- Let's stop saying to others, 'I go to church' and start saying, 'I'm a Christian'.
- Let's stop talking vaguely about 'God', (or even worse, 'the divine', 'the sacred') and start saying 'Jesus' more. Let his name be more on our lips.

The true meaning of Christmas is Christ: Jesus the Messiah, the Christ. Let's honour him. Let's be proud to name his name. Let's not be embarrassed by Jesus, for he alone is the reason for the season.