



‘Christmas! It’s for the children really.’ That’s what the man in the pub said, and his mates nodded in agreement. ‘And is

perishing expensive too!’ said another, and all nodded agreement again. Well, it seemed to make sense. After all Christmas begins sometime in October; the council puts out the Christmas Lights, TV adverts are all about Christmas food. It’s all robins, Bambi’s, fir trees, a fatish man in a red uniform, selection boxes, presents, and more presents. And then there’s the Baby Jesus, so it must be for the children really. But of course it isn’t at all.

This understanding of Christmas is exactly why we Christians have an uphill task at Christmas. Jesus was indeed a baby in Bethlehem, born as you and I are born from our mother’s womb

where we have been carried for 9 months. But it starts to get complicated when we Christians insist that whilst Jesus was born as we were, his conception was nothing like ours. Jesus is utterly unique; the offspring of a Virgin's womb upon whom the Holy Spirit of God did descend, therefore 'the child will be holy and will be called the Son of God.' (Lk:1:35) So what does this mean?

That's the problem with Christmas. We Christians persist in what sounds like a ridiculous belief. If we just dropped the Holy Spirit shadowing a Virgin bit, and concentrated instead upon the robins and snow scenes then everybody would find Christianity much more believable. Wouldn't that make more sense for us? And wouldn't that fill the churches again? Well it might (or, more likely, it might not). But in any case, the trouble is that it wouldn't be Christianity at all!

The faith of Christians actually depends on the Incarnation of Jesus, and always has done, right from the earliest days. Right from the earliest days of the Church after the first Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and Disciples they preached the good news that in Jesus, the Veil that separated earth from Heaven had been torn down, for the Babe of Bethlehem is none other than the Lord of Israel, the Son of God. In Jesus, God Most High came to tabernacle, to dwell, with His people, so as to lead them back to the Father that the life of heaven might be known on earth: ‘...on earth as it is in heaven.’

So certain were the Apostles and the Disciples of Jesus at Pentecost that nothing could make them recant it. Not ridicule, not torture, not even death itself. They couldn't do it because they were absolutely convinced that in Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, God had come amongst His people; Jesus is Emmanuel, God With Us, as the

prophet Isaiah had proclaimed. Plenty of clever and powerful people at the time had a vested interest in proving them wrong. Indeed the King of Israel, Herod, attempted to kill the child, but only succeeded in murdering the Holy Innocents. It shouldn't have been difficult to prove that Jesus was conceived and born like any other baby especially when you had at your disposal the resources of the greatest empire in history. Yet they didn't do it; because it couldn't be done.

Still today millions of people all over the world believe that Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem is in fact the Son of God conceived of the 'Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.' They include brilliant scientists and philosophers as well as plenty of 'ordinary' men and women of all ages. They believe it because they respect the witness of those first Christians, and because in many cases their own lives have been transformed by a relationship with Jesus - a relationship that

wouldn't make sense if He were only a man, and not the Son of God!

We Christians don't put our faith in a hero from the past, who showed generosity, compassion and love, who taught those around Him good things. No, we Christians put our faith in Someone who though born in the world at a particular place and at a particular time is alive and active in our own lives and in the world today.

And that, in a nutshell, is the real message of Christmas, not a message for children and childish ways, but a message for all time in all places, for it is a message that saves our lives, 'on earth as it is in heaven.'

