

Pastor's Page

"Christmas in a Pub"

On Friday evening, with Christmas fast approaching I did what many others were doing, I went to the pub! I was quickly recognised by the landlady who offered me a free drink! (It's ok I remembered my Methodist upbringing!!) I then went to search for my colleagues. Yes I hadn't gone alone, I was heading up the team who were there to do some carol singing. As soon as the other instrumentalist arrived the 6 of us shuffled through the crowd to the middle of the packed pub ready to lead some angelic arias! With the help of a hand held microphone we were ready to rip into "Hark the Herald Angels Sing". The impact could have been 'under-whelming' had it not been for some extra help. Two over enthusiastic (well oiled!) customers asked us if they could sing along and so we nervously agreed. Grabbing the microphone the two new lead singers, roared out the first carol, sounding more like Johnny Rotten than Johnny Mathis! They made quite an impact the crowd loved it. It was only after about the third carol when the microphone mysteriously stopped working that I discovered why the audience had been so enthralled by this musical mayhem. This dubious duo had been singing rude words!

However, we retrieved the situation, by handing out song sheets, doing away with the 'mike' and the punk rock vocalists and singing the traditional words! Yet the whole situation seemed incongruous as we manfully soldiered on serenading the revellers with songs about a bunch of 1st century shepherds, a heavenly choir proclaiming peace on earth and a baby lying in a feeding trough! How do people view this ancient tale?

Some people may see this familiar seasonal story as a welcome distraction from the harsh realities of modern life whilst others dismiss it as irrelevant religious propaganda! But does this ancient Christian tale have anything to say to 21st century people? Well the real story of the birth of Jesus is not all warm and cosy but is full of danger and difficulty. The heavenly child was born in poverty in an occupied country and from the beginning was seen as a threat to the authorities. A sadistic monarch, Herod, tried to get rid of him by his murderous activity in Bethlehem. His family had to flee to another land as refugees in order to save his life. This holy babe, divinity wrapped in humanity, still unable to talk, was already challenging people's lives. It would be another 32 years however before the authorities would catch up with him and finally nail him.....to a Roman cross! Yet amazingly this was all part of God's plan to bring peace on earth and to save the world that had rejected him. Now, you or I may prefer the cuddly cardboard nativity scene with pop-up animals and smiling shepherds to the harsher version of the Christmas story. But the biblical account of the birth of the Son of God is the only one that can bring real hope to a painful and sinful world.

So rather than incongruous, it is gloriously appropriate to sing again;

Hark! The herald angels sing: 'Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!
Joyful, all you nations rise, Join the triumph of the skies,
With the angelic host proclaim, '**Christ is born in Bethlehem.**'

Have a great Christmas!

24th December 2006