

Carol Service 2018 - The X of Xmas.

Happy Xmas - many cards, signs, shop displays declare that in some way or the other. The abbreviation Xmas isn't irreligious. The letter X is a Greek letter abbreviation for Christ. Even though the X is an abbreviation, I wonder at times if it is or if it really says more than that! Many places refer to the Holiday Season; they say "Happy Holidays" so they won't offend people who may not have Christian beliefs. Some want this time to return to its pagan origins of eating and drinking and so remove the Christian content. Two ladies were over heard in a big shopping centre as they looked at a Nativity scene *"Look at that, they bring religion into everything nowadays!"* I want to look at the X of Xmas to see what the X can stand for and what it can become for us:

1. The X of Something Wrong.

In school we would have our work marked and we have a ✓ tick or an X to our maths or spelling tests. We may have wanted the gold star, but sadly we had lots of X's – I thought my Primary teacher really liked me with all the X's she put on my work – but I was a bad speller. Our work and answers were wrong and the marks showed it. Maybe people use X instead of Christ to show something of their view of Him for their lives - He is fine for churchgoers, or like Santa great at Christmas, but not for them. People may know of Him, learned as a child, a teenager even, certainly know something of the Christmas story, but they say it is not for them, it doesn't fit in with their ideas or lifestyle and they want to live life as they want. It may be that they, either deliberately or subconsciously, mark Him as wrong for their lives.

That may seem a bit harsh, but in speaking to people over the years I have come to that conclusion that people may know of Christ and God, but Romans 1:28 *"they did not think it **worth while** to retain the knowledge of God,"*. Sadly, people can conveniently neglect or reject God and the X of Xmas can declare Christ and God as wrong for them. Yet for others it shows:

2. The X of Ignorance.

I have done some family research and found from census details a range of jobs by ancestors did. One census listed the job of someone as "Idiot". A lot of the documents I came across were signed by the people and often just with a X and this demonstrated their ignorance, they had little or no opportunity for an education. In school we would have a maths equation or a chemical formula to work out something that was not known and was X the unknown factor. We were ignorant of it and had to work it out to discover it.

Some people say God cannot be known and we cannot name Him or even give God a gender. To them God is an it or a force, or a power and yet at times of desperation they may cry out *"If anyone, anything is there, then help..."* They are ignorant of the reality of God and may not have taken time to find out and investigate if He is there and yet they may feel there is something, even someone there but they are not sure. The philosopher Voltaire said that *"If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him."*

The apostle Paul speaking to the sophisticated people in Athens in the 1st century- who he found them highly intellectual, but also very superstitious and religious. They had many altars and one they built was an altar to the unknown God, as an insurance altar, a just in case altar and he said to them Acts 17:23 (NKJV) *"Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:"* Paul then spoke about the Creator God, who made all things, who sent Jesus and raised Him from the dead and He tells everyone to truly turn from their wrong and be right with Him. Sadly, people can be ignorant of Jesus and who He really is and what He has really done and that includes His birth, life and death and resurrection. Could we be deliberately ignorant of God and Jesus? To be ignorant of Christ is a barrier to:

3. The X of Choice.

In national or local elections, we have to put our mark on the paper with an X. Hopefully we would have done this in an intelligent and thinking way, having considered the candidates, policies and parties. This is what we should do with Christ, but unfortunately the Bible says we have a bias away from Him and we do not really want Him what He has done for us. We feel we are good enough and can manage without Him, that we are the captains of our own lives and masters of our own destiny. Sadly, we choose not to serve God, but serve anything else, yet God would challenge us to choose to who to follow - Joshua 24:15 *"But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve"*.

Because we have this bias away from God, we are not able to choose Him because we seem to be gravitationally attracted to the wrong and to be repulsed, repelled away from Him. It is only as we realise God chose to send His Son into the world, that His Son chose to willingly come to this earth and be born with a fully human body (*which we celebrate at Christmas*), to live a perfect life and then to die on the cross for our wrong and that even the cross was a deliberate choice on His part for our benefit. Only as we see the need of this God to work in us and we ask Him to do that work, then our ignorance and wrong will be removed and we will then fully choose Him as our own God and Saviour, the one the angels sang about who was born there in the stable in Bethlehem. Many here in this church have known this and they see many things they never realised before, believed in Him and this X of wrong and ignorance became to them:

4. The X of Affection and Love.

How many cards, letters have been sent with a X on the bottom of them. Why do we do that? Because it shows affection, love - the kiss expressing love and affection. When we realise who Jesus really is, and why God the Son was born into this world, then we will see it is a demonstration of God's love - John 3:16 and we will know and enjoy His love.

At that first Christmas, God's love came down, was being made known and shown, but it was most fully revealed on Calvary, which is the highest point of God showing His love to us by not sparing His one and only Son, where Jesus willingly took the punishment our sin and rebellion deserved so we could know and experience the love of God. If we think

that Christmas is a wonderful and lovely time of the year, then just think how much better it would be when we know His love and affection in our lives. It would make such a difference to us if we know God and His love through the Lord Jesus and we will find that it is not just for Christmas, but for all times in our lives in and for every experience we go through and we will find it becomes:

5. The X Factor.

No, not the TV programme, but that which transforms lives and is the secret ingredient for our lives. Both Coca-Cola and Pepsi Cola claim to have the secret ingredients that make them so special. Jesus Christ is the secret ingredient, the X factor that transforms our lives. We are all living, but Jesus offers LIFE abundantly and that He is the secret ingredient, the X factor that transforms our lives and gives it meaning and purpose, for He gives us the life we should live in a right relationship with God. Such a life does give many, many benefits - a sense of being valued and loved, a knowledge of peace with God that lets us have peace in our own hearts, minds and lives, the hope of heaven and a purpose in living also. All this comes about and develops when we trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and Friend.

Perhaps these things do not make sense, but seem as nonsense, but to explain these things properly I would stand more chance of explaining the colours of a glorious sunset to an unborn baby, or to a person who has always been blind! To know Jesus is not only to know life in abundance here, but to have eternal life given us. As this happens, He gives us new motives for living and He helps us live it out too. It is

described as new life, being born again and it seems that radical and we feel we are a totally brand-new person. This is something of what happens when we trust the Lord Jesus Christ.

6. The X of Treasure.

On pirate maps, usually X marks the spot where the treasure is. The X in Xmas marks the place of real treasure and worth. One day all that is so precious to us now, this Christmas will be of no use or value - our presents, finances, health, possessions, even our nearest and dearest - for we will have to leave them all. Yet the treasure that is Jesus and the free gift of salvation He gives to all ask for, will then be seen in all its value and pricelessness. The treasure of eternal life which Jesus gives us will not perish, rust, decay and will never wear out or disappoint. It is eternal life and we will be in His home in heaven. Even here on earth there is interest we can draw down from this treasure - God's peace, company and help here on earth and this will never be devalued or face any credit crunch.

If we could have unbelievable treasure, wouldn't we put ourselves out to find it? Yet the Lord Jesus offers treasure beyond belief for both time and eternity - life from God, peace with and from God, a home in heaven. We, like the wise men of old, need to seek the Christ. I pray that what I have said will cause someone here to seek the treasure, which is Christ Himself, the one who was born the Saviour in Bethlehem and that we would make Him our own Saviour.

I pray that we would have a truly joyful CHRISTmas and we would know His help and love as we go into the New Year.