

## DEC Carol Service 19 – What kind of Christmas are we dreaming of?

I wonder what kind of Christmas are we dreaming of this year? Bing Crosby famously sang “*I’m dreaming of a white Christmas*” - still the best-selling Christmas record of all time (50 million so far). We may be dreaming of different types of Christmas this year. I’m going to suggest 6 and we will start with Bing’s:

**1. A White Christmas:** we may want a lovely picture postcard snow scene to greet us on Christmas morning. We feel it would add to Christmas, but what would it add? It would look nice, but if you had to travel to family, or they to you? Problems! Children, even adults couldn’t ride on the new bikes; maybe the snow could bring down power lines - depending on how heavy it was! That would mean no TV, no cooking or heat for some, new computer and game systems will not work. Couldn’t charge new mobiles! Suddenly a white Christmas doesn’t sound so attractive! Perhaps you would like:

**2. A Family Christmas:** Christmas is about families getting together, just being together and enjoying one another’s company. For some it will be a time of deep sadness as they would have had family members die in the past year, or marriages or relationships break up. Such things will be felt afresh at Christmas. Other will be real TV families - EastEnders with squabbles, fights, bickering and anger being the order of the day. So perhaps we need to add:

**3. A Happy Christmas:** I hope this is so for us all. Yet so many things can affect our enjoyment of the day - something doesn't work, or fit, or the wrong item or brand was bought. It may be our health on the day. Even the tension of wanting all go right can cause situations to explode "*All I said was...*" The family dynamics can make or break the day and very easily it can go from a Walton's Christmas to an EastEnders Christmas! I hope and pray that we all will have a really happy Christmas. But some long for:

**4. A Quiet Christmas:** Christmas can be built up in our expectations and minds. Yet really, we would like it to be a quiet and restful time. Yes, we want to see the family and friends, want to enjoy ourselves, want the adults, children and grandchildren to really enjoy it and yet at the same time we want a quiet Christmas! A number of people nowadays head out and have their Christmas meals in restaurants. Some may have flown away for a quiet holiday and let others do the work on their behalf. Yet they miss out on:

**5. A Traditional Christmas:** what is a traditional Christmas? The Victorians hoisted many ideas onto Christmas! In recent decades commercial interests have added so much more. We just have to look at the variety of Christmas cards available - they range from cute, sweet, snow scenes, humorous, rude, crude and religious. We could always begin our own family traditions! Most families have them - certain things are expected within families, or the way that things are carried out on the day. They are great and memories are built on them. No doubt we would all want this Christmas to be:

**6. A Special Christmas:** we want this, so that in weeks, months, even years ahead we can look back and say something like “*Christmas 2019 - wasn't that a really brilliant and special Christmas*” and be able to say why and bask in the warm glow it generated. For some people it will be their first Christmas as a married couple. Some of us we can remember the first Christmas with our first child in our home - unless the son or daughter was born really near Christmas - as happened to some of us and dad ended up taking presents into the hospital as mother and daughter were still in the maternity ward! I wonder what Christmas we will have in a few days' time?

We'll break there and later we'll look at the first Christmas using the same headings - the Bible tells us of it and the birth of Jesus - not a dream though, but a reality.

**1. A White Christmas?** We celebrate Christmas at this time of the year, but we don't know when in the year the first Christmas was! Scholars say it probably occurred in July to October. Supermarkets seem to cover all these dates as well as November and December just to be on the safe side! It would make sense to have been in the warmer months - shepherds and flocks would not have been out on the hills in the bleak mid-winter. Sorry if that blows your sentimental ideas apart, but we can be sure it was not a white Christmas!

**2. A Family Christmas?** The answer to this has to be both “*Yes*” and “*No*”! No - because they were many miles from home, it was their first Christmas married, but they were staying in a shed, a stable, a cave - even a Travel Lodge would

have been better! Yes - because the couple became a family - as Mary gave birth to the One who is the reason for the season! Jesus was born in unhygienic and poor conditions; He was laid in an animal's feeding trough – a manger. We picture it as a family scene. Yet the One born there was no ordinary child, but was God in a real body - *“veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail incarnate Deity”*. The One born there was a real human being, fully man and yet at the same time fully God. He came to make the only way for us to belong to God's family. So *“Yes”* it was spectacularly a family Christmas.

**3. A Happy Christmas?** Again, both *“Yes”* and *“No”*. Mary and Joseph would have been so happy at the safe arrival of baby Jesus, others may have been pleased also, but it was a fairly limited group. Amazingly there were others who are not only happy, but overjoyed and bursting to tell the news - angels! The Bible doesn't usually focus too much on them, but in the narrative of the first Christmas they are very much noticed - especially by the shepherds out in the fields near Bethlehem. All was dark and quiet and then suddenly an angel appears and the glory of the Lord shone around them. We are used to floodlights, but they were not - especially so as the light was heavenly and coming from this angel. He told them the good news. Then suddenly the whole sky area was full of angels - some say millions of them - and they were all praising God, rejoicing in His love and goodness in sending this One to be the Saviour of people. We know the shepherds were happy at this news and rejoiced. They then hurried off to find the baby. When they found Him, they rejoiced, celebrated and told others of this baby.

Although the events of that first Christmas caused great joy and happiness to most people, someone was not pleased or happy and it sparked off a murderous campaign by king Herod and many families were left grieving and upset as he slaughtered all the baby boys in Bethlehem under 2 years old...

**4. A Quiet Christmas?** Not really. It was a long journey for Mary and Joseph and there is no mention of a donkey to travel on in the Bible! Possibly Mary had to travel on foot some 80 to 90 miles through a mountainous region and all this while some 8 months plus pregnant. Then they were in a busy, bustling town (*village*) and no room anywhere, except in a stable, cave and there Mary gave birth. Then the shepherd visitors came, possibly others. The Bible tells us that when the wise men arrived, Mary, Joseph and Jesus were in a house and probably was 15-18 months or so later. A quiet Christmas was not the word for that first Christmas - amazing, eventful yes, but definitely not quiet!

**5. A Traditional Christmas?** Of course not! It was the first Christmas! It was way outside the thought pattern and ways of not only Judaism, but anyone's thinking! Who could imagine that God would come down-to-earth as a real human being, be born into this world in such a poor situation to peasants! Hardly what we'd plan and write if we were making it up! We would want to impress, cause awe and wonder. Yet this was the way God sent His Son into the world and so we consider:

**6. A Special Christmas?** Without a doubt - it was special, so very, very special. It was amazing, startling, mysterious and a wonderful thing to consider. It really is a puzzle why God would do this, but it is a special, mysterious event as God the Son took to Himself a real and true human body, be born into this world and live amongst us, to know and experience all we go through. This is startling and so special. Yet we are told He ultimately came to be the Saviour; the Rescuer of people like us. Joseph was told previously that he had to give Him the name Jesus - for He will save, rescue His people from their sins. Jesus came with that purpose in view. He was going to do all that was needed for us to be able to be right with God, to make peace between man and God and God and man, so that real peace could be known and experienced by men and women, boys and girls. He did that in His birth, life, death and resurrection.

That sounds absolutely wonderful and special, but we are to realise it has to be applied personally. It's not an automatic thing. The Bible tells us that each of us need to personally and individually trust, believe on the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour. We need to realise it is as if He was born, lived, died, rose again for us personally as an individual and for all the things that we have done, thought and said that are wrong against God and other people. When we realise that, then the first Christmas becomes really special as we begin to see God's love for us personally - that God sent the best He had for us so that we can have a home in heaven and know the joy of Christmas 24/7.

I pray that whatever Christmas we have, it would be one that we would remember all the right reasons, but especially when we realise that the Saviour born there in Bethlehem so long ago is our own Saviour and that would make this Christmas so special forever as we'd know the One on which Christmas centres. I pray we all would know God's richest blessing on us, our families and friends this Christmas and as we go into the New Year.