

Tuesday Reflection 15th December

“A Christmas like no other” is what we are facing. But is that necessarily a bad thing? Or is it that in our Advent and Christmas celebrations we are in a rut - “The same procedure as every year”? Could it be that the restrictions imposed by the need to counter the Covid pandemic in fact give us the freedom to imagine/celebrate a different Christmas?

What happens for many people? Hardly are the summer holidays over, and the run-up to Christmas begins, with increasingly frantic activity - planning the festive celebrations, ordering the turkey, buying presents, writing cards. And then, in many cases, the aftermath. The Christmas period sees an increase in domestic violence and relationship breakdown, and higher levels of debt.

How was it though with the first Christmas? “How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given.” Apart from a handful of people - Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth - nobody knew what was coming (although a few magi from the East had a premonition that something was afoot). And how much of an impact did the actual birth have at the time? Things must have been pretty hectic in Bethlehem, with the town bursting at its seams with the influx of people coming for the census, so it is unlikely that much notice would have been taken of the arrival of a baby (except by a few shepherds, who were at the bottom of the social pile anyway, and a party of foreigners, who had not yet arrived).

What the shepherds and the magi had in common was their curiosity, their desire to find out. What they also had in common was feelings of awe and wonder, although they did not realise the full import of what they were witnessing.

And how about us? We have the gift of hindsight - or is it a curse? We think we know what it means, what it is all about - which means we have lost that feeling of curiosity, we do not feel the need to look further, to see what Christmas means for us individually and collectively. And because we think we know what it is about, we no longer have that feeling of awe and wonder which the shepherds and the magi had.

Perhaps we can use the freedom which the Covid restrictions have given us to question what we think we know about Christmas, and in the process rediscover some of that feeling of awe and wonder.

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