

Morningside Sermon 10.30am 25/12/19

Christmas Day

Happy birthday, Jesus!

Psalm 98; John 1:1-14

I wonder how many people were born on Christmas Day?

Story tellers say that Father Christmas was born on Christmas Day.

Humphrey Bogart, US Actor, 1899

Princess Alexandra, 1936

Orlando Gibbons, English organist and composer, 1583

Dorothy Wordsworth, English diarist and poet, 1771

Justin Trudeau, Canadian Prime Minister, 1971

Clara Barton, a pioneer American nurse who founded the US Red Cross and worked as a hospital

Nurse in the Civil War, 1821.

Isaac Newton, discoverer of gravity and scientist, 1642

Cab Calloway, big band leader, 1907

Kenny Everett, comedian, 1944

Noël, Countess of Rothes, philanthropist, and heroine of the Titanic where she took the tiller of

her lifeboat, and helped row it to the safety of the Carpathia, 1878

Alastair Cook, cricketer, 1984

Annie Lennox, singer, 1954

Ian Bostridge, tenor, 1964

Dido, not the Queen of Carthage, but the singer, 1971.

I am indebted to Professor Google for the information.

However, I noticed that nowhere was that other birthday mentioned – that of Jesus – which we celebrate today.

Scholars tell us that the birth of Jesus may not, of course, have taken place in the winter, but He wouldn't be the first monarch to have two birthdays in the year – a real one and an official one.

I wonder if that means we, like Charles Dickens:

*“I will honour **Christmas** in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach!”*

I wonder about about all those who share this day as their birthday. We hear stories about gifts being conflated, and poor Christmas Day babies being told that one gift, instead of two to mark both events, will do. I know of one Christmas Day baby who makes sure, now she’s older, that anyone she knows who has a birthday on the week before and the week after Christmas gets extra presents. Maybe not a lamb, or gold, frankincense and myrrh, but that’s a lovely thought and practice. According to an old superstition, the child born on Christmas Day will have special fortune, perhaps to make up for getting cheated of birthday presents!

What do we celebrate on Christmas Day? Not simply the birth of a baby, born in difficult circumstances in a faraway land. A date now so over-gilded with consumer excess and family traditions, and ritual that it is hard to see the central truth. We celebrate, on this day, and particularly at this service, as simply as we can, the Saviour of the world. We celebrate the perennial, persistent coming of hope into the world, when hope continues to be needed. We celebrate the heart-stopping reality that God so loved the world that He gave to us, entrusted to us, His only Son. We celebrate the embodiment, the incarnation, of love, God made flesh. The second chance, the new beginning, the reminder that there is more to life, the re-setter of priorities, the recalibration of what should truly matter in life and in living.

A cake with candles would be nice, but not enough. Cards with good wishes would be nice, but not enough. Gold, frankincense and myrrh would be nice, but even that would not be enough.

What might approach enough?

What can I give Him, poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.

If I were a wise man, I would do my part,

Yet what I can I give Him, give my heart.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen