

# KINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH ONLINE NOTICE BOARD - 49

Have you noticed this year how much earlier Christmas has begun? Talk about Christmas is earlier. Christmas decorations, to brighten up these gloomy times, have appeared earlier. We're told the reason is covid, its impact on families and the freedom of people to spend lots of money in shops gaudy with Christmas decorations.



It's a trend that prompts us to consider some big questions: *What is the true spirit of Christmas? What should we prize about Christmas? What is Christmas really about, how should we respond to its message, how should we celebrate it?*

I wonder if this early interest in Christmas is strange in a country that's turning its back on the Christian gospel, or is it's extravagance just what we would expect in a nation adrift from its moorings? Of course this celebration of Christmas has very little to do with the Christian gospel. We live in a secular society where Christmas is more about make-believe fantasy than the birth of Jesus. Christmas is an opportunity to escape the difficult and dismal realities of life – to escape the miseries of the world.

The Gospels show this secular spirit is the opposite of the real meaning of Christmas. In the Gospels we see the coming of Jesus into the world was as much about rejection as about welcome, as much about exclusion as inclusion, family conflict as well as family celebration – at his coming Jesus was met with threat, danger, fear, poverty, dependence, deprivation and destitution.

The first Christmas, the coming of Jesus into the world, wasn't an escape from the miseries of the world but was God himself entering into the world's painful humiliation – entering into this sinful, dark, difficult, diseased world. The coming of Jesus was God's direct, personal experience of poverty, homelessness, cold, suffering, rejection, hunger and littleness. Christmas isn't an escape into a season of indulgence, excess and intoxication but is about self-forgetfulness, self-denial and self-giving service. Here is a prayer that sums-up the heart and soul of Christmas:

*Teach me good Lord to serve others as you deserve. To give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wound, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward except that of knowing we do your will.*

That is worlds away from what Christmas has become in our secular society. The spirit of service is the glory of the coming of the Lord, born in poverty, laid in a manger. That's what the singing of angels and the worship of shepherds and wise men was about. The spirit of service should be for us also a source of joy and gladness. The spirit of service is the Spirit of love – the Holy Spirit who came upon Mary and moved her to words that revealed in her this true Spirit of Christmas, the Spirit of love, joy and peace: *'Behold the Handmaid of the Lord, be it to me according to your Word'*.

Mary's unqualified **'Yes'** to the Lord is the Spirit of Christmas: *That is why Christ, when he came into the world, said, 'You have given me a body that I may obey you. I have come to do your will, O God'*.

(Hebrews 10.5-7)