

CHRISTMAS IS GOOD NEWS FOR ALL!

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For children Christmas is good news. For Christmas means parties – parties at school and parties at church, parties with friends and parties with the family; parties where there is lots to eat and games to play. Christmas almost means presents – presents in a stocking and presents around a tree; presents from Father Christmas and presents from parents. And, of course, Christmas means pantomimes and nativity plays, trips to the theatre and to the cinema; even perhaps trills to the ballet and the concert hall.

Christmas too is good news for adults. For we too enjoy parties, presents, and pantomimes. We love the special foods that go with Christmas; the lighting of candles and the listening to carols; and above all the being together with family and friends.

But Christmas is not good news for everybody. Christmas for many is a time of sadness and of pain. Christmas is not good news for workers, when redundancy looms; nor is it good news for families where coming together exacerbates all the old tensions. Christmas is not good news either for those who have gone through the pain of marriage breakdown, where mothers and fathers without their children. And Christmas is not good news for those who have lost loved ones in the year that has gone by. Yes, Christmas can be bad news; it can be the time when the pain of living intensifies. The very fact that Christmas is meant to be a time of happiness only makes our unhappiness all the worse: it exposes the wound and rubs in the salt.

But the good news is that precisely for those for whom Christmas is bad news, it is in fact good news. For Jesus has come into our loneliness and pain. “The word was made flesh” (Jn 1.14); Jesus shared our flesh and blood (Hebs 2.14). Jesus has entered our world and has shared our human condition. He knows what it is like to be depressed and troubled in heart, to be misunderstood by family and friends. He knows what it is to experience pain – physical pain, emotional pain, mental pain, even spiritual pain. He knows and in knowing he understands. And because he knows and understands, he can offer help and strength to those for whom life is dark and bleak.

It is against this background that a first-century Jewish Christian preacher wrote: “Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebs 4.16). God is not unapproachable; God does not live in some ivory tower remote from human experience. For Jesus is there at his right hand, Jesus who can feel for us and with us.

Here is good news for the lonely and the weak, for those for whom life is dark and bleak. Life does not have to be lived in our own strength. For the Jesus who came is the Jesus who is ready and waiting to give help to us all. So in the words of an American paraphrase of our text: ‘Let’s not let it slip through our fingers... Let’s walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help’ (Eugene Peterson, *The Message*)

Paul Beasley-Murray