

No.16

14th January 2021

Dear Friends,

I hope you are keeping well in these difficult times. Christmas has come and gone and we are faced with yet another lockdown. Sadly, this means we are unable to resume our normal RCIA meetings on a Thursday evening.

As before, therefore, we are going to keep in touch by a weekly newsletter. Unlike before we have not prepared a programme of talks - that was a process being discussed when it became clear that lockdown was on the way - so we have decided to concentrate in our newsletters on our relationship with Jesus. Members of the RCIA Team will contribute their thoughts or favourite passages from great spiritual writers to help us deepen our love and friendship with Our Lord. Being a disciple of Jesus - to coin a phrase - is not just for Christmas but requires commitment for life!

We start this week with a lovely reflection by John Kimberley on what Christmas means to him - the union of Heaven with Earth - and our sharing in the life of God.

Each week we will continue to include a Sunday Sermon from Bishop Robert Baron with a timely homily this week on the Baptism of Our Lord, which ties in so closely to our theme of Incarnation and our relationship with Jesus.

We will also have the odd poem or words from hymns to encourage us - finishing with Night Prayer as we would do at RCIA. I hope you find this useful and interesting.

Take care and God bless,

John de Waal.

Living the Christian life in the light of the Incarnation.

“Oh, how I hate Christmas!” was a remark I made about 30 years ago when I was a vicar in a parish in West Sussex. Needless to say, it was a remark which caused me a little bit of a problem and led to me having to explain precisely what I had meant, because, in truth, I love Christmas but hate what Christmas has become.

To explain the Christmas process, or rather problem, for me begins each year in the middle of October when I go into a shop and hear the background muzak has been changed to include carols and seasonal songs. By the time Christmas Day comes around, some two months or one sixth of a year (!!!) later, I feel that if I hear ‘*While shepherds watch their flocks by night*’, or “*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie.*’ one more time I will explode. Commercial influences that present an image of a perfect Christmas, (that is, as long as we spend enough money on things we neither want nor need), creep in and have a corrosive effect upon our understanding of the Christmas story.

I believe the message and meaning of Christmas is far too essential to be trivialised and distorted in this way. Christmas talks to us of the love of God for His world, and the way in which this love, present in heaven, became a visible and recognisable part of the world. In and through Christmas we witness how the Creator and the created became one, when heaven and earth were perfectly linked. The word we use to describe this is “Incarnation”, which is Jesus being born naturally in the way all human beings are born, and then living fully as a human being, knowing and understanding the weaknesses and foibles of normal human life.

John Kimberley.

In a national magazine recently celebrities were invited to suggest an event or moment in history which they thought had changed the world dramatically. Some mentioned revolutions - the Russian or French - one spoke of women getting the vote. Not one of them referred to the birth of a baby boy 2,000 years ago ...

One Solitary Life

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman.
He grew up in another obscure village
where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty.
He never wrote a book;
He never held an office;
He never went to college;
He never visited a big city;
He never travelled more than two hundred miles from the place where he was born.
He did none of the things
Usually associated with greatness.
He had no credentials but himself.
He was only thirty three when public opinion turned against him;
His friends ran away;
One of them denied him.
He was turned over to his enemies
And went through the mockery of a trial.
He was nailed to a cross between two thieves.
While dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing - the only property he had on earth.
When he was dead
He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.
Nineteen centuries have come and gone
And today Jesus is the central figure of the human race and the leader of mankind's progress.
All the armies that have ever marched;
All the navies that have ever sailed;
All the parliaments that have ever sat;
All the kings that ever reigned put together
Have not affected the life of mankind on earth
As powerfully as that one solitary life

Bishop Robert Barron's Sunday Sermon.

To appreciate this sermon you may wish to read St Mark's Gospel 1 : 7 - 11, and St John's Gospel 1 : 35 - 36.

[youtube.com/watch?v=uOn4LW67Eak](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOn4LW67Eak)

Final Prayer - taken from Compline (the Night Prayer of the Church).

Antiphon. Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.

Nunc Dimittis.

At last, all-powerful Master,
you give leave to your servant
to go in peace, according to your promise.

For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared for all nations, the light to enlighten the Gentiles and give glory to Israel, your people.

Antiphon. Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.

A short time for silent prayer.

Concluding prayer.

Lord our God,
restore us again by the repose of sleep after the fatigue of our daily work; so that, continually renewed by your help, we may serve you in body and soul. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

Blessing. Lord, grant us a quiet night and a perfect end. Amen.

A final thought.

“The Gospel never views human beings with pessimism. It never invites us to gloom. On the contrary, it comes to awaken us to a peaceful joy. And when we suffer, our hearts can be broken, but not hardened.”

Bro. Roger of Taizé