

Have we forgotten something?

Hopefully everything is ready; tree dressed, decorations up, dinner planned and presents wrapped. Phew, now we can all sit down and relax, but wait a minute isn't there something else? It's true that with all the hullabaloo surrounding Christmas, if we're not careful we can easily forget what lies at the heart of the celebration - the clue is in the word—CHRISTmas and we can be just as guilty as anyone else in celebrating the secular festivities whilst unwittingly omitting to consider the religious one. How are we to avoid slipping into trap?

The telling of stories is the time honoured means by which all of us find our place in society. Each of us has our own narrative with our own particular triumphs and tragedies, our own successes and failures. These events make us and shape us, they provide our backdrop and form the source of our knowledge and experience which help us to frame our future. Although none of our stories are identical, many of them are similar, and they are filled with the shared themes which revolve around the big questions of how and why the things that happened to us happened. Making sense of them and discovering purpose in them is part of the process of coming to understand them. Christmas gives us the opportunity to reflect on this, but we need a moment of peace in the busy schedule of our lives which allows such reflection, and finding that moment isn't easy. I want to suggest one way in which it could be done.

As Christians we are (we think!) familiar with the crib. We've seen hundreds of them and hopefully we've all got one at home. We get it out each Christmas, but do we ever look properly at it and ponder on the event it represents? Do we ever think about the lives of the characters whom for that brief moment, were caught up in the birth of Jesus? I think it's worth a go because when we do, we find a reflection of our own stories and how intimately they are bound up in the Christmas one. In this story we find concern, worry, doubt and anxiety and at the same time we find joy and hope, trust and awe, but above all what we discover that in the midst of everything is love. A love which transcends and overcomes the doubt and the worry, the concern and the anxiety, a love which unfolds into joy and hope for the future, even if difficult times lie ahead. When we look into the crib we see our lives, our circumstances and our situations being received in love by the incarnate word of God, who through this child lives alongside us as he walks our journey and takes our part. *Come unto me all who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest.* Those words are not sentimental but are spoken with heartfelt meaning and they challenge us to live them in our lives. In an article entitled *Render unto Caesar* written by Pope Benedict for the *Financial Times* and which appeared in last Wednesday's edition, the Pope wrote: *The birth of Christ challenges us to reassess our priorities, our values, our very way of life. While Christmas is undoubtedly a time of great joy, it is also an occasion for deep reflection, even an examination of conscience. At the end of a year that has meant economic hardship for many, what can we learn from the humility, the poverty, the simplicity of the crib scene?*

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On Sunday at 5.00 pm we are celebrating our Advent Liturgy which will be a reflection on the Magnificat. Why not come along and take this opportunity to ponder and reflect on your story and place it in the context of the crib, the Incarnation, the dwelling of the word made flesh, in the reality of all our lives?