

GIVE US A CLUE

PART ONE

→ So, the Young Church have helped us to solve the mystery of Exxmas and we're really grateful for all the hard work and preparation that all of you have put into that – young people, leaders and helpers – thank you so much for leading us in worship so well, so far this morning! But there's more to come! And whilst the younger children are getting ready for that, we're just going to think a little more about what the young people have just been sharing with us.

.....When we hear the Christmas story every year, we are often reminded of the fact that the people who had been waiting for the Messiah to be born, missed it when it happened! How could that be? How could they miss such an amazing event? How could they miss all the signs? They'd been given plenty of clues about his coming by the prophets over many years as we've heard already this morning. So, how could they miss it?

.....And then throughout his life, as it gradually became apparent to some people who Jesus was, there were still those who really didn't get it. The pieces of the jigsaw weren't fitting together for them. They weren't recognising the signs. They weren't picking up on all the clues that were there.

.....But, I don't think we would really have been any different you know! Why not? Well, because sometimes we're not terribly good at recognising what's right in front of our noses are we? Oh, we may think we know what's going on around us or that we're the kind of people who don't miss a thing! But are we really?

→ A few years ago, I remember coming to the Contact Christmas party and being challenged to complete a quiz which Peter Crummett had compiled. All around the Coffee Lounge there were lots of pictures displayed. They were all close up pictures of places around Cheadle Hulme and even though many of you who were present that night had lived here all your life, you still struggled to recognise many of those places, so there was no hope for foreigners like me and Leslie!!

.....Now, just to try and prove my point, I'm going to show you a few close up pictures this morning, not of Cheadle Hulme, but of everyday objects that many of us use, and let's see how many you can recognise!

Show close up pictures on powerpoint slides and encourage the congregation to provide answers

.....Well done! But how many of you can honestly say that you got all ten of those right! Mmm! Well done to you, but I think that proves the point really doesn't it? These are all fairly common objects that many of us would encounter regularly and still we don't recognise them for what they are! We don't pick up on the clues. We don't notice the signs, all because we're having to look at things from a different angle and a different perspective and things don't look like we expect them to look!

→ And perhaps that's part of the problem with Christmas today too. The picture of Christmas that is presented to the world is one in which the real meaning

and the real answer to what it's all about is hidden and obscured by crackers and tinsel and trees and candles and shopping and reindeer and many other things. People are being encouraged to look at Christmas from the wrong angle and they aren't being able to pick up on all the clues that are around about what Christmas is really all about. And so for many people, perhaps for some of us here this morning, there is a question mark over what it is really all about. There is an X where Christ should be in the celebrations. And part of our responsibility as those who follow Jesus, is to make sure that people pick up on the clues and really get the message

.....So, just for now, and I hope that they might be ready, otherwise I'm going to have to waffle for a bit, the younger children in our Young Church are going to take us to the heart of it all as we hear again about the events of the first Christmas.

PART TWO

→ Thank you so much to all of you for doing such a fantastic job this morning. You've taken us right back to the heart of the story and reminded us that Christmas is all about the birth of a tiny, vulnerable baby in a manger in Bethlehem. But that baby wasn't just any baby. He was the Son of God, come to live among us, come to save us. The clue is in the name. Jesus means "he saves." Immanuel means "God with us!"

.....So, as we all make our last minute preparations over these next few days are you distracted by the tinsel and the tree and the mince pies and the turkey and the crackers and the holly and the long "to do" list that you still have? Are you oblivious to what this is really all about? Or are you noticing all the little things that are quietly going on around you, pointing you back to the truth of the story that is at the heart of this season? Are you piecing together all the clues that are there for those of us who have eyes to see and ears to hear?

.....God has an interesting way of never quite revealing the whole picture of his plan or his purpose or his nature to us at any one time. Things happen one step at a time, so, that means that we do have to constantly be looking for clues and signs to help us discover who God really is and how he wants us to live our lives. But as we draw closer to Jesus, we discover that the clues are more easily noticed and the signs are more easily recognised because as we get to know and love Jesus more, so he reveals God to us.

.....So, when you light the candles in your homes this Christmas, let them speak to you of the light that Christ came to bring into the darkness. And when you pull a cracker and put the paper crown on your head, let it remind you that the baby born in a manger was also the King of Kings. And when you exchange gifts with your loved ones, remember the greatest gift that was ever given to the world, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, given to us all because God loves us all. The clues and the signs are all there for us to see and the new life, the light and the hope that he came to bring can be ours if we will simply follow him. And let's also make the effort to help others understand the clues and the signs that they see. Let us help others to replace the X in their Christmas with Christ himself, the one whose birth, life and death makes all the difference in the world.

