

LET GOD DO IT ALL

→ I wonder how many of you reach a point at some time during December where you've absolutely had enough! You enter a shop and they're playing Jingle Bells again! You're offered yet another mince pie when you visit a friend or the radio is on and yet another version of "O Holy Night" is playing! Suddenly there's a feeling that waves over you that has you saying, I've had enough of this already, and there's still another week or ten days to go until Christmas! Ever had that feeling? I sometimes get it when I'm on about my fourth or fifth turkey dinner as I do the rounds of Christmas dinners at church groups or other organisations!

.....It can sometimes feel as if Christmas has been going on for weeks and weeks. The mince pies were on special offer back in November trying to make us feel as if we should have bought them long ago and the adverts for the latest toys and gadgets that you simply must get as presents begin to appear as soon as the summer holidays are over. They somehow want us to believe that this is all a sign that the shops and the supermarkets are really on our side. They want to help us prepare in really good time for Christmas and all the celebrations that will be happening. I'm sure that's why the supermarkets are already stocking Cadbury's Crème Eggs in readiness for another celebration that's more than three months away!

.....All around us there's a sense of people telling us to get excited. You must get into the right spirit we're told. That's why the radio stations bombard us with festive music of every style; to help us think Christmassy thoughts. That's why the shops and the television channels encourage us to prepare for the bonanza of gift buying and watching films. You will get into the mood by buying more and more presents and watching the latest antics in Eastenders or Coronation Street or whichever "soap opera" it is that you enjoy, if that's the right word to use!

.....The whole point of all these activities seems to be that it's what you do that makes your Christmas a successful and happy one. If you get into the mood it will all be fine. If you buy the right presents it will be a success. If you watch the right television programmes, you'll be happy, at least until you go back to work after Boxing Day!

→ Tonight, as we listen again to the story that's at the heart of our celebrations, then we're reminded that the best way to have a really happy Christmas is to understand that it's not about what we do at all, but actually it's all about what God has done and is doing. The birth of Jesus is the moment when God becomes like us; when he comes and lives amongst us and eventually dies for us. Christmas is all about God bursting into our little, busy human worlds and bringing something extraordinary into our ordinary lives. Jesus was a human baby but he was also God himself, so he was able to live his life in just the way that God has always wanted us to live our lives – centred on him. That's something that many of us try very hard to do every day, but most of us don't do it very well, and make mistakes every day too!

.....But, that's exactly why Jesus came; because however hard we try, we'll never live perfect lives, we'll never create a perfect Christmas and we'll never live a

perfect ordinary day. Jesus came as a baby in Bethlehem, a baby who was born to die, a child who was destined to experience a cruel death, death on a cross. That's why the wise men included myrrh, an embalming fluid, amongst the gifts that they brought for the Christ child. Not really what new parents would necessarily want to receive for their child, but in this case a sign of what lay ahead.

..... That's why we sing the carols that we've sung tonight. Not because we want to just celebrate the birth of one more baby, but because we know what this baby came to do and has done. Jesus, the King of the Universe, the Lord of everything, born as a humble baby in Bethlehem, but born to set us free from the consequences of everything that we ever do wrong or that has been done to us.

.....And the most amazing thing of all is that as opposed to all the things around us that tell us that a successful Christmas is about what you do, we need to do very little to receive the freedom that Jesus came to bring. All we have to do is say to Jesus, "Yes, I believe you are the Son of God, the baby born to die. I believe you are the one who can transform my existence from one that is focussed on trying to do my best into a life that lets you be at the centre." And when we say that to him he will come and transform our lives as he did for Mary and Joseph, he'll transform our workplace as he did for the shepherds and he'll transform our questioning and searching minds as he did for the wise me. He's transform us so that we can live knowing that he has everything in his tiny baby, wrinkled, nail pierced, blood stained hands.

→ This year, let's take time to think about whether we've ever really done that. We've listened to the pop songs and we've sung the carols. We've heard the shops tell us what we need to buy and we've read the story from the Bible. We've watched the Christmas specials and we've heard the meditations on the birth of Jesus. I'm guessing that most of us have made all our plans for the food, the parties, the presents and the entertainment that will help our celebrations go with a swing this year. But have you taken the time to truly say "yes" to Jesus Christ, the King of the universe, the Lord of all, the one whose coming amongst us gives us reason to celebrate at all? If you have then you truly have reason to celebrate! If you haven't then what better time than now in a quiet moment to stop trying to have a perfect Christmas and let Christ give you the most wonderful Christmas you will ever have as you give him the rightful place in your celebrations. Remember it's not about what we do, but it's all about what God, in Christ has already done.