

+WEEKLY SERMON

communicate@blackburn.anglican.org



Little baby never grow old!

For many, Christmas is yet another wearisome event that just has to be got through! Presents to buy; cards to write; houses to decorate; family to visit etc.

But in the midst of our merry-making and celebration; underneath the mistletoe and tinsel a child is born.

As John Betjeman put it in his poem Christmas "The Maker of the stars and sea become a Child on earth for me?"

We like babies. They are cute and rarely threaten us and we can to some extent control them. May be that's why Jesus is so often left as a tiny baby in the manger unable to demand or harm or challenge those who each year religiously engage with all the trappings of Christmas but miss out on the greatest gift the world has ever known.

The France-British composer, John Featherstone expressed this so beautifully in his Christmas song:

Little baby boy lying in a manger
Mary's source of joy picture to behold
There before the Christ-child sage and shepherd kneeling
Little baby never grow old.

Little baby boy treated as a fable
Fairy-lights reflect Israel's guiding star
Each new journey over they return no wiser
Never really know who you are.

What have they done to my saviour?
What have they done to my Lord?
What have they done to the rest of his life?
It's too good to be ignored.

What have they done to the story?
Follow it through to the end
Dying in pain and then rising again
He is the saviour of us all.

All too often Jesus remains a baby in a crib.
We fail to let him grow.
We fail to let him fulfil his destiny.
We fail to let him be born in our heart
We fail to let him transform our lives.

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For some, they have many questions that stop them receiving the greatest gift the world has ever known. For others they just struggle to believe. For still others they prefer their own free thinking and trust in their own belief systems.

George Bernard Shaw was one such free thinker and liberal philosopher. In his last writings he wrote, "The science to which I pinned my faith is bankrupt. Its counsels, which should have established the millennium, led, instead, directly to the suicide of Europe. I believed them once. In their name I helped to destroy the faith of millions of worshippers in the temples of a thousand creeds. And now they look at me and witness the great tragedy of an atheist who has lost his faith."

George Bernard Shaw was a brilliant man, yet he rejected the message of Scripture and placed his trust in his own systems of belief, based on human reason. Yet he could not find lasting inner peace, and he slowly lost confidence in what he believed.

Many people today in the turbulent times of economic crisis and uncertainty are looking for something secure that will give them hope and a sense of peace. There are no easy answers to these complex situations that surround us. But one thing is for sure, relationships help. Christmas reminds us of the importance of relationships - but most of all the importance of our relationship with God.

My prayer this Christmas is that as you journey to the crib once again, you would go home a little wiser, trusting a little more and committed to let the baby Jesus grow up in your heart and life.

The Very Rev Peter Howell-Jones, Dean of Blackburn