

Midnight Mass 2023

Christmas wouldn't be the same without music. No wonder in this country we got rid of those ghastly puritans and their killjoy mindset – not being able to celebrate Christmas with music and all the other things we enjoy. So we are going to start with a music quiz: Put your hand up when you know the song. And I'll make a few comments upon it.

The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight. (O little town of Bethlehem)

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes. (Away in a Manger)

He was little, weak and helpless;
Tears and smiles like us He knew:
And He feeleth for our sadness,
And He shareth in our gladness. (Once in Royal Davids City)

The Christmas season starts on December 25 – tonight. It is a season and not a day the main season lasts 12 days and finishes with the Feast of the Epiphany however the greater season lasts until 2nd February – 40 days when we celebrate Candlemas. Those way points of the season are different and joyful and set out in the diary section of your booklets tonight. Many will have moved on by tomorrow and thrown out the decorations and tree long before sadly. There is more to Christmas than a day and I was glad to be reminded of this by some of our sea cadet and RM |Cadets this year who suggested some new songs and one I hadnt heard before.

What if happiness came in a cardboard box?
Then I think there is something we all forget.
What would happen if presents all went away?
Tell me what would you find?

Today hold's something special, something holy not superficial
So here's to the birthday boy (*Jesus Christ last verse*) who saved our lives
Its something we all try to ignore and put a wreath up on the door
So here's something you should know that is for sure.
Christmas must be something more. (Taylor Swift – Christmas)

Christmas is something more. Consider the real marks of Christmas.

1. Incarnation - The central theme of Christmas is the Incarnation, the belief that God became human in the person of Jesus Christ. This mystery highlights the profound love and humility of God, who chose to enter into human history as a vulnerable infant.

2. Preparation. It is the fulfillment of Prophecy: The birth of Jesus fulfills numerous Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. This theme underscores God's faithfulness and the continuity of His salvific plan from the Old Testament to the New.

3. For everyone - Universal Salvation: The Nativity signifies the opening of God's promise of salvation to all humanity, not just to a specific people. It emphasizes the inclusive nature of God's love and the universal scope of Jesus' mission.

4. Joy and Hope: these are not the same as inane smiles and optimism. The birth of Jesus brings joy and hope to the world, by dealing with things as they are and showing how they can be better.

5. Keeping it real: Jesus' birth in a humble setting, away from opulence and power, teaches the value of humility and simplicity. It challenges worldly notions of greatness and power, promoting a spirituality of poverty and simplicity. Ordinary folk can be used by God and make a difference.

6. Window into the heart of God: Divine Love and Mercy: The Nativity is a profound manifestation of God's love and mercy, demonstrating His willingness to come close to humanity. It invites reflection on the depth and accessibility of God's love for each person.

7. Passion not platitudes. Peace and Goodwill could sound trite but the message of the angels, "peace on earth and goodwill toward men," highlights the themes of peace and reconciliation brought about by Christ's passionate involvement in the world that cost him his life. No cheap love here, peace and harmony among all people is costly.

8. Light in Darkness showing the way: The birth of Christ, often celebrated with lights, symbolises the coming of light into a world of spiritual darkness. Jesus as the light of the world dispels darkness and guides humanity to truth because he shows he doesn't just tell.

9. Role of the Holy Family: The roles of Mary and Joseph emphasise obedience and faith in God's plan. Their responses to the divine call serve as models of faith and trust in God's will. They are ordinary folk like you and me – we are family not bystanders.

So in the words of Taylor Swift may Christmas be something more and may it be more because of you and the the birth of Jesus in you that you may be prepared to be lights of love, peace, hope and joy being involved in the real world just as God is involved in your real world and mine as celebrated by the best of our carols - not just for a day but for life.

*The Revd Fr.David Wylie RN
Christmas midnight*