

## A Christmas Mystery.

The story of Jesus' birth has fascinated people for 2000 years. All around the world nativity dramas like this one are being played out. Last weekend in the Times magazine I read of an unusual one in Surrey. 'O Little Town of Wintershall.'

But what is it all about - this coming of Jesus? Why was it necessary? And what is behind the special name, "Jesus – Saviour"? There is something very unusual going on. This was captured very well in the drama we have just seen. There is a mystery in Christmas.

In fact Liz and I are reading a story at the moment called "*The Christmas Mystery*" about a boy and a magic Advent calendar. It is our 'Book at Bedtime'! There is a chapter to read each day as the boy opens another door in his Advent calendar.

Often the best way to understand something is with a story. Jesus often did this. So, here is a story to help us understand the Christmas Mystery. It is about a man called Alan who arrived with his family in South America for a three year stay. It did not begin well. There was no one to meet them when they arrived, exhausted, at Lima airport. They eventually got to their friend's house where they were to stay but their little girl took an instant dislike to the place and announced that she wanted to go home. I will let Alan tell his story.

*One morning I go up to her room and discover to my dismay that she has packed her bag. "What are you doing?" I ask. "I'm leaving this horrible place and going home!" she exclaims. Her voice is absolutely firm, and her chin set like stone. I go downstairs and talk to my wife. We are concerned that she may just go out of the front gate and wander off. As we talk she comes downstairs with her rucksack on her back and heads for the door. We try and tell her that it just isn't possible to go back to England, that we are thousands of miles away. But there is no reasoning with her. "Right" she says, "I'm going" – and she walks out of the door. I look at my wife and decide there is only one thing to do. "OK" I say, "I'll come with you" – and off we set.*

*We open the front gate. "Which way?" I ask. "Left" she replies, without hesitation. We walk together to the end of the block. "Which way now?" "Straight on." We cross the road and walk another block. "Left again" she proclaims without a trace of uncertainty. Another block. "Right" Another. "Straight on." We walk briskly on. "Left", "Left", "Straight on", "Right", "Straight on". But after a while the pace starts to slow and her hand grips mine a little more tightly. After quite some time we arrive at yet another corner. "Which way?" I ask gently. Her lip begins to quiver and she looks down at the floor. "I don't know" she says, and bursts into tears. I kneel down beside her on the path and hug her very tight. ... We are both weeping profusely... We have lost our way. After a lot of struggle, over the next few weeks and months, we will find it again. But it will not involve a journey back to England, or anywhere else for that matter. (Taken from Michael Lloyd's, 'Café Theology.' Alpha Publications*

2005. He, in turn, is quoting from Alan Hargrave's book, 'An Almighty Passion – Meeting God in Ordinary Life'. Triangle / SPCK. 2002)

This is a parable of the human condition according to the Bible

- None of us actually know where we are going.
- There is no reasoning with us.
- We are not happy with where we are and we strike out on our own.
- This makes us feel we are in control.
- The truth is, we are lost.
- We have to go down many blocks and find ourselves in many a cul-de-sac before we will admit it.

But it is also a parable about God and the coming of Jesus.

- God doesn't stop us, when we strike out on our own.
- But neither does He abandon us.
- He comes with us. He joins us in our lost ness.
- The coming of Jesus is about God joining us.
- God became a human being. A real, flesh and blood person.
- He came to share our pain and give Himself for us.
- God has not left us in our rebellion with its terrible dangers.
- He comes with us. He is very near, by our side.
- He waits until we come to realise our predicament.
- Then He holds us and weeps with us in the pain of our own making.
- And slowly He helps us take a different way

It must have been great fun to take part in the nativity this morning. Being in a nativity play – you find yourself in the story! Not everyone could be in this morning's play – but everyone is in the drama of redemption. None of us are spectators. Now there's a mystery! We are in the story because it was for us Jesus came.

Many people don't feel they have the time to think much about mysteries. Life is so busy. But when you don't know whether you will live another day, this is one mystery that you want to make sense of.

Canon Andrew White, the Anglican vicar of Baghdad, says he has spent much time in the past year with British soldiers, talking through the mystery of the coming of Jesus - in, of all places, Saddam Hussain's former palace. He says, "*When you are living at risk there is no alternative than to think seriously.*" Those who have come to faith have been baptised in Saddam's swimming pool. He has used a course called Alpha with the soldiers. We run Alpha's here in County Church. Alpha is a safe place to explore and ask your questions.

We would be delighted to tell you more. It is for people serious about solving the Christmas mystery.

**John Wilthew. December 2007.**

