

Christmas

Jesus our Immanuel

Queen Victoria was one of our greatest and best loved Queens, But she had some strange ideas. One was that ordinary people should not be allowed to become too familiar with Royalty. She had a son whose name was Edward and she was very particular about the people to whom Edward talked. She especially disliked Edward speaking to the barber, yet she realised he had to have a hair-cut.

The problem was solved by having Edward talk to the barber via a valet. The barber would say to the valet "Would his Highness like a short back and sides?". And the valet would say to the Prince and the Prince would reply to the valet who then communicated with the barber. Edward never got to speak to the barber himself! But Queen Victoria was not all that happy about the arrangement. She was haunted by the idea that, although the Prince never talked to the barber he did speak to someone who spoke to the barber.

Some people think God is a bit like that. He is too High and Mighty to be bothered to communicate with mere mortals like us. And who knows but He might be contaminated by our sinful humanity.

Christmas gives the lie to that. The High and Mighty God does not stand aloof from us. Here at Bethlehem "God comes down and bows the sky, and calls himself our friend". He assumes our humanity with all the risk of contamination and becomes one of us and one with us. Which is what the word 'Immanuel' means. God with us.

That's good news. No longer can we complain that God is unconcerned about us as individuals. For in Christ God has become man; and a very particular man at that. Jesus is his name. No longer can we say that God is too remote and therefore unable to sympathise or empathise with the problems of human existence. In Christ God has experienced all that it means to be human and He understands. Joy and suffering, laughter and tears, hunger and homelessness and specifically temptation itself were all part of Jesus' experience. Even a violent death. When people complain at some tragedy overtaking them and exclaim "God only know what I am going through" they are dead right. God does know. In the jargon of today God has been there, done that and got the T-shirt.

I started with a story about Victoria, Queen of England. I end with a story about the King of Denmark. When the Germans invaded Denmark during the 2nd WW they compelled every Jew to wear an armband with a yellow star of David on it. When the crunch came it was easy to identify a Jew and isolate him for special treatment. The King of Denmark then issued his own decree. He, and everyone of his subjects would wear an armband with the yellow star of David emblazoned on it. And, if that meant being singled out for the gas chamber, so be it.

So, too, with the King of kings. At Bethlehem, God in Christ wears the armband of our humanity. He is Immanuel; 'God with us' and Christmas gives us cause to sing:

"Knees and hearts to him we bow;
Of our flesh and of our bone;
Jesus is our brother now;
And God is all our own"