

PCC NEWSLETTER – DECEMBER 2014



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The Real Story

LAST WEEK the Christmas lights in Beckenham were switched on and a few days before that the lights were lit in Penge. The Mayor of Bromley asked the crowd if they really wanted Christmas lights and the assured him they did! They went on with a big bang and celebration.

We managed to hand out invitations to our Christmas services to a number of people in the crowd milling about on Beckenham Green and walking up the high street. This was more difficult than I thought as I didn't want to get a leaflet thrown back at me! It set me wondering... how do we tell our friends about the true meaning of Christmas?

How often have you heard someone moaning about the expense and the fuss of Christmas, and do you use this as a chance to say what Christmas is really about?

I was listening to the radio and they were talking about whether school celebrations at this time of year should be called "Winter Celebrations", "Seasonal celebrations" or "Christmas". The presenter felt it should be "Christmas" because, although she says it isn't religious in any way and thinks it's a lot of rubbish: "Christmas is essentially British" and part of what being in Britain is all about! I think she feels it is something like Thanksgiving for Americans. This made me think that we need to reclaim the true meaning of Christmas and let people know what it's all about. It is not about Christmas trees and parties and presents. We could get rid of all that.

In fact between 1642 and 1660 the Parliamentarians banned Christmas because of the extravagance and decadence they saw. They felt that "Christ-Tide" should be celebrated in a solemn way with fasting and seeking the Lord. They did not want shops to close, or partying through the night, and it was work as normal! They were religious people who wanted people to focus on Christ and not all the traditions that had grown up around the Nativity. They banned Christmas and promoted a stricter observance of Sundays as the Lord's holy day – as Moses had commanded that one day each week be kept holy as a day of rest.

So what should our approach be? Maybe we would find Christmas less stressful if we focused less on maintaining all the tradition and more on seeking God in our lives and what he is doing among us every day. Maybe we can tell our friends that Christmas is about Christ being part of our lives everyday and what joy this brings.

Let this be a time of celebration of Emmanuel – not a story of long ago – but a celebration of "God with us" every day. And let us see him doing a miracle in our lives, our families and our communities.

Lynn Mcshane

Psalm of the Month

Psalm 46

1. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
2. Therefore we will not fear, though the Earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
3. Though it's waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with it's tumult.
4. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the most high.
5. God in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.
6. The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the Earth melts.
7. The LORD is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.
8. Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations he has brought on Earth.
9. He makes wars cease to the end of the Earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.
10. 'Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the Earth.'
11. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

MANY READERS will associate Martin Luther King with this psalm. We have sung the hymn he wrote as a paraphrase of it: "A safe stronghold our God is still"; Luther himself sang it at times when he was particularly discouraged, and it is a wonderful expression of quiet confidence in God's sovereignty. The psalm itself starts from that point, moves on to a particular experience of it in the deliverance of the city, and finishes off with an assurance that God will establish his universal kingdom of peace. God himself speaks to us with that familiar phrase "Be still and know that I am God". In our own troubled times we need that assurance of God's constant presence on our lives. As John Wesley, the Father of Methodism, said with his dying breath: The best of all is, God is with us".

Pam

What Christmas Means to Me

Christmas to me is a gift from above,
A gift of salvation born from God's love.
For far beyond what my mind comprehends,
My eternal future completely depends
On that first Christmas night centuries ago
When God sent his son to the Earth below.
For if the Christ child had not been born,
There would be no rejoicing on Easter morn
For only because Christ was born and died
And hung on a cross to be crucified
Can worldly sinners like you and me
Be fit to live in eternity.

So Christmas is more than getting and giving,
It's the why and wherefore of infinite living.
It's the positive proof for doubting God never,
For in his kingdom, life is forever.
A this the reason that on Christmas day
I can only kneel and prayerfully say,
"Thank you God for sending your son
So that when my work on Earth is done,
I can look at your holy face,
Knowing you saved me alone by your grace."

A Prayer at Christmas

The shepherds heard the angel's news,
The wise men travelled far,
And there was wonder, joy, and hope
For all who saw the star.
Now Father, once more help us seek
The joy of Christmas night,
And spread the news across the Earth
Of endless life and light
And Father, may we share your love
In heart and soul and mind,
And send your blessings round the world
With peace for all mankind.

Iris Hesselden

Prayer

Lord as the year draws to a close
Thank you for so many things:
For home and friendship, warmth and food
And all each new day brings,
For all the guidance and the help,
The things we have achieved,
For comfort, hope and kindness,
The healing we've received.

Lord thank you for the love we share,
It grows with every day,
And like a beacon in the dark
Will light our future way.
Now, as the year draws to a close,
lord be our guard and guide,
And in the year which lies ahead
Be always by our side.

Beckenham Street Pastors

AS YOU MAY KNOW, Street Pastors is an initiative that started in London in 2003, and now operates in cities and towns all over the UK. Street Pastors are trained volunteers from local churches who care about their community. They patrol the streets in the late evenings when clubs, pubs and restaurants are disgorging people who may have over-indulged.

In Beckenham a team of 3 or 4 go out every Friday night from about 10:30pm until the streets are quiet, working their way along the High Street, liaising when necessary with the Police and door staff. Working on a rota, each pastor will go out about once a month. They aren't there to Evangelise but to show their commitment to Christ in what they do: they carry flip flops for those who can no longer walk in their high heels and are in danger of stepping on broken glass; they carry foil blankets to protect people who are scantily clad from the cold, they help people who are being sick or have been upset, they make sure young people are safe while they wait for a taxi home.

Recently Beckenham Street Pastors have asked local clergy to pray with them before they go out, and I have the privilege of being on a rota to do so. I did my first stint on the 14th of November and came away inspired by the quiet dedication and courage of the three Pastors I prayed with. These people are

unsung heroes. They really need to feel they are being held in prayer by their fellow Christians. Please, when you are sitting at home dry and warm, or heading for your nice cozy bed late on a Friday evening, say a prayer for the Street Pastors who will be out on Beckenham High Street in all weathers, putting their faith into practice.

Pam

A Prayer for Christmas

God, give us eyes this Christmas to see the Christmas star,
And give us ears to hear the song of angels from afar.
And with our eyes and ears attuned for a message from above,
Let Christmas angels speak to us of hope and faith and love -
Hope to light our pathway when the way ahead is dark,
To sing through stormy days with sweetness of a lark,
Faith to trust in things unseen and know beyond all seeing
That it is in our Father's love we live and have our being,
And love to break down barriers of colour, race and creed,
To see and understand and help all those who are in need.

Thanks to Pam Owen, Lynn Mcshane, Chris Mcshane, the Beckenham Street Pastors and the congregation of Penge Congregational Church.