

# FOCUS ON FAITH

Stephen G. Derges, Pastor of Bridgnorth Baptist Church



## So HERE IT IS!

I can't begin to imagine how many times I've heard Slade's 'Merry Christmas Everybody' ringing out in the shops this year – Noddy Holder's stony voice blaring out as we dash to make those last minute purchases. Mind you the song has been a nice little earner for the band – 5 weeks at Number 1 in the charts in 1973 and then re-recorded by a whole host of others including Westlife, Oasis and The Spice Girls, plus constant airplays on radio ever since.

I'm always interested in the lyrics of songs but the chorus of this one is a tad strange. It may be my penchant for questioning and analysing, but after hearing the song for the umpteenth time I began to speculate what they were thinking when the band penned, *"So here it is, Merry Christmas, everybody's having fun. Look to the future now, it's only just begun."*

I wonder what kind of future they were looking forward to and what it was they were anticipating that was just beginning? Okay it may have been poetic licence or artistic creativity – the rest of the song doesn't take up the theme – but I feel that they've actually hit upon something in these lyrics.

**Let's take a moment to think about what Christmas is and isn't about.** It's a love story with amazing consequences and outcomes. Sadly commercialism and political correctness has eroded much of the real meaning and whilst it's a great opportunity to celebrate, over-indulgence comes with its own outcomes and consequences. And Christmas is not just for children. Of course there is what some would describe as a 'magical' quality to Christmas and it is often a great time for families to get together and spend time with each other. But we should also spare a thought for those who will be alone or possibly sad because Christmas triggers off memories that are painful and difficult to handle.

**But what of the love story?** I'm not just talking about Mary & Joseph although theirs is a wonderful example of human love triumphing over less than favourable circumstances. In the culture and society of their time a supposedly unmarried pregnancy meant you were socially ostracised. Joseph's decision to brave the undoubted mutterings, innuendos and possibly blatant criticism to carry on with the arranged marriage took a fair amount of courage and commitment. And of course Mary could have said 'No' to the Angel Gabriel's request that she would become Jesus' mother. Thankfully though she was also courageous and agreed. No, the love story I'm referring to involves a Father and

a Son making a momentous decision – separation from each other which would eventually lead to the ultimate sacrifice. The baby in the cradle eventually becomes the man on the cross and all because of His love for people.

The Bible says that God formed the plan enabling us to rebuild the broken relationship with Him before the world was created. This wasn't a 'spur of the moment' or an 'on a whim' decision – it was pre-planned and foretold. So in one sense Christmas wasn't the beginning – it started a lot longer ago than that.

There are numerous passages in the Bible that predict the arrival of a baby of royal lineage (as Jesus was) who would be born in inauspicious circumstances in a small, largely unknown (and therefore unimportant) rural town called Bethlehem. In fact ancient scholars had been awaiting his arrival for years believing that the good times would come when this Messiah King made his entrance.

Our Advent Prayers of the Week have referred not just to the promise of the Christ and the fulfilment of the promise but that there is much, much more to come. There are even more references in the Bible promising that Jesus will return – not as a baby this time but as the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. It seems to me that if the first coming was accurately predicted and fulfilled we can be certain that His second coming is also assured.

The first time round, whilst many people were looking forward to the Messiah's coming they were either looking in the wrong place or didn't fully recognise Him when He arrived. I hope we're not in a similar position now or, even worse, not believing that He's coming back at all.

Christmas is a season of celebration and I hope you rightly enjoy this time of peace and joy. But let's not lose sight of the plan behind it – the promise of the restoration of the relationship between God and mankind. Jesus is also known as Emmanuel – God with us. He took the initiative and made a way for us to enjoy that peace with God for ever – and as we know forever is a long, long time.

**Perhaps Slade got it right. It's time to 'look to the future NOW – it's only just begun!'**

If you'd like to find out more about what Christians believe, log on to [www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk](http://www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk) where you'll find information on local Churches together with contact details, plus information on activities and other resources.