



BIRD'S EYE VIEW

The Spirit of Christ-mas

"There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say," returned the nephew: "Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round - apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that - as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, thought it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!"

So says Scrooge's nephew Fred in 'The Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens.

Christmas 2009 seems to have come upon us rapidly - it seems only a few weeks ago since the Falkirk Council removed the Blue Christmas tree from my office window - and they put it back up this Wednesday, so I feel like the fairy on the top of the tree again!

One hopes this 'Credit-Crunch Christmas' will be an opportunity to celebrate honestly and spend wisely (which magazine did I see the article called 'Christmas Dinner @ £3 per head?'). I had wonderful ideas of knitting amazing gifts for Christmas, but despite starting in April, the ratio of balls of wool to things ready to wrap seems to be the wrong way round... The circus of Christmas time activities seems to start sooner each year, as we all try to fit in Christmas celebrations, (and not meaning to sound like the Grinch!) BUT WHY DO WE DO IT?

There is no biblical command to celebrate Christmas - God gave the Israelites various feasts to celebrate long before He sent Jesus to earth as a baby... Jesus told his disciples to remember him by drinking wine and eating bread, which we do

at Communion which is certainly not a birthday party... Paul and the other apostles were unlikely to have had anything to mark the occasion of Jesus birth, but as Christianity spread, particularly into Europe, a midwinter feast culture was gradually adopted ... and despite the Reformation and John Knox, the celebration of Christmas has mutated through the ages into the program of events we squeeze in each December - and we add the duties of Christmas card sending, present buying and tree decorating. No wonder we are sometimes overwhelmed by orgies of overeating, wrapping paper and spending.

It is good to remember the simple obedience of Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds... and the kindness of the Innkeeper... the wiliness of King Herod... and the wisdom and generosity of the Wise Men. It is wonderful to celebrate the advent of Jesus and the start of God's amazing plan to make his gift of eternal life available to all. May we take these virtues and make our own traditions from them.

This year, Polmont is having an 'old-fashioned' start to the Christmas Season with the Victorian Christmas. A good chance to remind ourselves of the Christmas traditions and enjoy munching mince pies, singing carols and raising money, but I hope that this Christmas Season will also be a time to reflect on what Fred called 'the veneration due to the sacred name of Christmas'.

I hope, too, that it will be a time for you to open your hearts to celebrate 'this good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time' by reaching out to others, not only your family and friends through gifts and cards and seasonal emails, but also to those a bit removed. Like the refreshed Scrooge, find ways of blessing those around you - spend time (if not money!) creating gentle traditions of kindness and charity. You won't get rich by doing it, but it will do you good!

Let's say '**God bless Christmas!**' together!

*With all love,
Tracey*