

# Merry And Bright...?

December 23, 2020

**By Rev Paul Graham**



Christmas 2020 will go down as one of the strangest on record. The government's game of "will we, won't we" was answered on Saturday late afternoon with the announcement of tightened restrictions and less travelling for those who had pencilled in Christmas with families in far-off counties.

With a wider family who are spread around the country, we were already resigned to a Zoom-Christmas for the majority, unsure whether some of our nephews and nieces still have legs or not. But we had planned to spend some time away with Vicky's mum and stepdad in Hertfordshire, with a brief meeting with my folks in the salubrious surroundings of Beaconsfield Service Station. With Tier 4 now surrounding us on all sides, our plans, like so many others', have had to change yet again.

This is not ideal, in fact it was rather hard to take on Saturday afternoon. But, before I don my sackcloth and find a convenient pile of ashes to plonk myself down onto, let's take stock. Yes, this is not great. But it stops a long way short of being the end of the world. We will still have plenty to eat, to do, and there's

more than enough on the telly to keep us occupied. Of course, we would rather be spending the festive season with family, but at least we have family to spend it with.

Before anyone gets too aerated and starts declaring that Christmas is in some way cancelled, consider its origins.

An unmarried girl, who with her betrothed have in all probability faced scorn and ridicule from their nearest and dearest by remaining faithful to each other amid accusations of unfaithfulness (how else to explain a pregnancy without Joseph's - ahem - input?). They have to travel 70+ miles on foot to a distant town; sorry, no little donkey to carry Mary safely on her way - even if there was one, Joseph would have been its passenger (such is the injustice of first century patriarchy). Once there, they find no friendly welcome from Joseph's extended family and have to hunker down for the night in a cave behind a bustling, over-crowded inn.

Unwelcomed aliens, the couple become three as the baby is born in the company of animals who have never heard of midwifery or hot towels. The only gas is an unpleasant intrusion from their four-legged companions and air is a welcome relief when the wind changes direction.

Hygiene doesn't improve with the arrival of the baby's first visitors; smelly shepherds bringing in the full range of hillside aromas and muck. I doubt they spent long rearranging their tea towel headgear or made sure that their sheep wiped their feet on the mat in their haste to meet the newly born Messiah.

But in the midst of all this dirt and grime comes the song of the angels. Maybe they've managed to keep their robes pristine, hovering as they do above the scene like Frank Spencer in that famous *Some Mother's Do 'Ave 'Em* Christmas special. Or maybe they're too busy joyfully raising their voices at the prospect of peace on earth to notice the smell.

So, what's your Christmas going to be like?

I imagine that it will be closer to the one we're anticipating than the one that Mary and Joseph experienced. We're fortunate to live in a country that isn't enforcing the mass movement of people<sup>[1]</sup>, displacing them from their homes, leaving them destitute, feeding off the scraps that they can find in the generosity of those who are confronted by a new set of uninvited neighbours. This happens elsewhere in the world and for those affected, their Christmas is going to be spent far away from the place they would call "home", if it still exists. Of course, there are people in our own country who are without a place to live and can only dream of chestnuts roasting on an open fire, and we are compassionate enough to want to do as much as we can to help as many as we can, within our limited means.

But we can get too weighed down with it all: our own problems or those around us, near and far. We can forget that in the midst of all the dirt and muck of everything that everyone is facing we still have the song of the angels accompanying us. If it was OK for them to sing about the God Baby as he was born in the squalor of the Bethlehem stable around 2,000 years ago, then it's quite OK for them to sing over the world today, as messed up as it is now.

This Christmas, as we face the uncertainty of 2021 in the shadow of the upheaval of the past 12 months, may we go accompanied by the song of the angels who continue to proclaim:

*"Glory to God in the heavenly heights, peace to all men and women on earth who please him."*

*(Luke 2:14 - The Message)*

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[1] With our new way of living, any movement at all is generally frowned upon and would be deemed unwise.

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(Image: [Nativity](#) by Gari Melchers)