



“Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home.” G.K. Chesterton

Next Meeting at Barrow Castle

Sunday 18 December

10.45 Coffee, 11.15 Service

Theme: Christmas!

Led by Peter (and perhaps an elf or two)

Reflection

We have just been told – courtesy of the 2021 census returns – that the UK is no longer a majority Christian country. This comes as no surprise to anyone following religious trends, we've been heading in that direction for decades. And the British Isles have never been exclusively Christian – there have always been people from other faith traditions who made their home here, and people who kept to the old “nature” religions, and more recently people of agnostic or atheist views. However, it is true that for many centuries Christianity has been the dominant religion, and thus has influenced the prevailing culture, from the timing of high days and holidays, through the laws of the land, and overtly in events such as the coronation of a monarch but more subtly in charitable support, art, and music. It will take more than a minority on a census return to undo that historical dominance, though secularisation has also been gathering pace in such areas as the provision of welfare and education, to name but two of many.

As we approach Christmas, we might perhaps reflect on its lasting place in the annual national celebrations. While Easter is the key event for mainstream Christians, and was founded as an annual celebration among them very early in the faith's history, it appears to have become secondary in Britain, and for many is simply the early spring holiday. On the other hand Christmas has become the British festival of the year, although it was not celebrated by the Church until the Council of Nicaea in the 4th century established the Feast of the Nativity, timed for the winter solstice (in that era) and replacing the Roman bacchanale of Sol Invictus. It was not always so: Christmas was banned by the English Puritans as too pagan, and was not popularly revived until Dickens encouraged it with his writings. It still had a long way to go to become the Christmas we now know, but its spirit was enhanced. Since then it has acquired Santa Claus, around whom there is a mythology more connected with materialism than religion, on-screen entertainment, and the resurfacing of many of the old customs of Yule.

Could it be that this blending of old and new elements is the reason for the success of Christmas? Feasting and decoration of the home were part of the end-of-year revels long before the birth of Christ. In an agrarian economy people gathered to spend the darkest days indoors, with food that would not keep through the winter being eaten up, and they turned to story, song, and even misrule. Now we have family and friends getting together to enjoy a great meal and some fun, in a society where we may no longer live in close proximity to loved ones. As disposable income has increased, so has giving, in terms of presents – but also in charity donations, which is a universal offering to those less well-off than ourselves, and by no means confined to Christians. Christmas has its constant elements, but changes with the times.

And yet . . . there is something about the Nativity Story that *will not* be excluded. There is a blessedness to Christmas that is beyond the magical arrival of Santa (except to young children). It is a story that is retold each year: the arrival of a special human being, homeless and vulnerable, yet known as the child of God. It is the combination of the humble and the remarkable, recognised by both shepherds and kings, directed by the heavens. It is a message of hope to a world waiting for a way-of-being beyond any reasonable expectation. Christmas would not be the same without it. Long may it continue.

Kay

Important Notice about Meetings in 2023

(please read, learn, and inwardly digest)

- For a variety of reasons there will be **no meeting in January 2023**
- In February, March, and April 2023 we will meet on the **Fourth** Sunday
- From May through December 2023 we will meet on the **Third** Sunday
- All dates available on the BUF website at <https://bathunitarian.weebly.com> and announced monthly in the newsletter and on the BUF FaceBook page.

Christmas As A Holiday

*Christmas is a holiday for friends,
However, they may be, or not, related.
Remember that the three wise kings were strangers
In search of one remote, uncanny dream.
So may we all be far more than we seem,
Together bound for dark and haunting changes,
More lovely for the loves we have created
Along the lonely paths from means to ends,
Stumbling towards that star of Bethlehem.*

Nicholas Gordon

*Wishing all members, friends, and their families a
blessed Christmas, and a New Year of Hope, and may
we all hold in our hearts the message of the Angels:*

Peace on Earth, Goodwill to All



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