

It's Simply Christmas!

By the time December arrives, messages and conversations have already been had and exchanged between members of my immediate family along the lines of, "what are we going to do about Christmas presents this year?" In previous years we have tried "Secret Santa" where we each receive one present from one mystery family member; we have tried putting a price limit on presents we exchange – it's hard not to overspend when you find just the right thing in a shop or on-line, and we've tried leaving everything to chance or good fortune. Believe it or not until quite recently we've all had Christmas stockings to open on Christmas Morning too, packed with small, carefully wrapped anonymously labelled presents. By the way, our grandchildren are excluded from limits of any kind. We give them what we want to give them. Who wouldn't?

What are we going to do this year? Virtually nothing. Apart from giving gifts to those three who are 6 and under.

We all agree that we have got everything we need and more. We also agree that a Christmas without the usual exchange of presents will be just as enjoyable as one with them. What we love and appreciate at Christmas are these things: The Christmas story which never changes but from which there is always something new to discover; each other's company – simply being together; playing games – and at least one new game will be tried out this year; eating and drinking together; looking back at the last year and looking forward to the coming one.

The lovely thing about all this is that each year, for the last 8 years when we've tried different things we've all agreed and we've all been happy. That's an achievement in itself isn't it?

Why have we had these conversations each year, why make it so complicated? Saving money, saving time, novelty and fun all come into it. But this year it's a bit different. One house move (my eldest daughter Lisa and her family), one household increasingly committed to environmental concerns (my middle daughter Helen and her partner), and one Rectory still trying to de-clutter, a project that is taking years. And there is plastic. You can't avoid hearing about plastic these days and rightly so - problems of pollution, damage to our health and the health of sea borne creatures everywhere. In my bedroom I've got some things I've been given at Christmas that I've never once used and I'll have to throw away one day. But how am I going to without further damage, further pollution, further cost? Even the wonderful panacea of recycling is being uncovered as either a myth or a farce depending on your level of cynicism.

God gives us his created world to savour, enjoy and care for. God give us one another to love, nurture and appreciate. God gave Jesus to love us deeply and in ways beyond our imagining or understanding. He gave his Son because he loves the world – every part of it. We are all invited to join with God in celebrating Christmas and to join with him in the outworking of its message and purpose.

May I wish you all a very happy, peaceful and love-filled Christmas.

James