ALTERnativity

Just God, Simply Christmas

www.alternativity.org.uk

Registered Charity Number: SC032416
ALTERnativity’s strapline is ‘JUST GOD, SIMPLY CHRISTMAS’.

ALTERnativity want to encourage people to get back to the heart of the Christmas message, God being born amongst us to proclaim a new way: the way of liberation, freedom and justice for all peoples.

- Too many people are living in grinding poverty, denied basic freedoms and rights.
- Climate change is displacing people from their land as erratic weather makes traditional farming increasingly untenable.

How we celebrate Christmas in a world where so many of our sisters and brothers are hungry is a constant challenge to us as people of faith.

With this challenge before us, at ALTERnativity we want to find ways to help people think through their actions at Christmas and yet still have a joyful, meaningful and fun celebration.

In preparing for Christmas we encourage people to consider:

- What does it mean that God became human?
- How do we see the holy family as real people, coping with change, pressure and joy?
- Can we resist the pressure to over-spend?
- How do we respond to Mary’s concern for the poor?

For more resources please visit: www.alternativity.org.uk
Or find our advent reflections on Facebook.

Supported by Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS).
The Perfect Christmas

“And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” Luke 2 v 7.

The birth of her first child can’t have panned out how Mary would have imagined it. Surely she was expecting a homebirth, a local midwife, freshly spun swaddling cloths; perhaps a crib hewn from cedarwood by her handy husband. Months of morning sickness would have been softened by the hope that the baby would be born surrounded by both families who would be there to offer support.

But with each aching mile on the journey from Nazareth, Galilee to the bustle of Bethlehem, she must have begun to realise that the Messiah would almost certainly be born in less than perfect circumstances.

And so it was. In a stranger’s shed with no one but Joseph by her side, she gave birth to a son and laid him in a feeding trough.

But in the darkness of the night sky, angels sang and stars burst open with delight.
We can imagine it but could we ever get the Perfect Christmas? In today’s world of commercialism, secularism and loneliness how can Mary’s joy and the angels song be part of our Christmas journey.

- What are your favourite bits of the Christmas celebrations?
- What are your least favourite bits?
- What do you feel puts pressure on you at Christmas?
- How could you maintain the surprise and delight of Christmas this year and embrace less-than-perfectness?

**Prayer**

Mysterious God, may we never lose our sense of wonder about the surprise and delight of Christmas. And may we seek it out even in the midst of our less than perfect lives.

Amen
Unintended Gifts

The three wise men arrived after a long journey. Bringing gifts - heavy gold; fragrant incense and myrrh. The star stopped over a stable. They went and found a plain-looking couple with a new-born boy. There was nothing royal about him. But it felt right. They kneeled in front of the crib, trying to introduce themselves to the puzzled parents. They took out their gifts and put them on the floor.

The parents gasped in surprise. The little boy looked up at them, and made a face that looked like the beginnings of a smile. But he only gurgled and spat up some milk. His mother looked embarrassed and told her husband to find something to wipe the boy’s face with. “Don’t worry” said the first wise man. Use this! And he removed the cloth that had been wrapped around the clay jar of Myrrh. She took it, lifted up her boy and wiped his face.

When she lifted him he spat up more milk that dribbled down into the crib. And the wise men saw it was only lined with straw. The second wise man quickly removed his mantle and put it in the crib. “There you go” he said. My mantle is a bit dusty, but it will keep him warm. The mother smiled gratefully and laid the boy down.

The crib wobbled slightly, and the third wise man saw that there was a bit of wood missing. If only I had something to put there, he thought. So he took off one of his sandals and put it under the crib. It was a good fit.

The boy’s father said “there’s no need for that great sacrifice! A man needs his sandals!” But the woman said: I’ll teach my boy the value of gifts from the heart, and we will always remember your kindness!

The men just smiled, and bowed to the boy in the crib, who now did have a smile on his face. The men marvelled at this miracle they still didn’t understand. They looked at the parents and saw their surprise and gratitude over the expensive gifts and also over the improvised but well-needed gifts they had been able to give. As they rode off they thought that although people called them wise, they still had much to learn.
Are you a person that has the Christmas shopping completed early or do you like waiting until that rush of Christmas adrenaline takes hold? Do you like to savour the unwrapping of a gift or rip the paper off? We are all different. How do we value what we find inside the wrapping?

- What’s the best gift you have ever received?
- What gift have you given that’s been most appreciated?
- Is there anything that you could do this Christmas that someone you know really needs and would appreciate?

**Prayer**

Lord God, thank you for the times that people have seen our needs and come to help us. Even the small gestures of time and help can make us feel loved and appreciated. We thank you that we have also been able to do that for others, supporting friends and family as we walk life’s journey together.

Amen
Christmas All Wrapped Up

“They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh and presented them to him” Matthew 2 v 11

Imagine two gifts. One is a perfectly packaged, pre-bought coffee set. The box is finished with a red bow. In it there are two coffee cups, three miniature bags of coffee and two candy canes. It is beautifully presented. The other gift is in a nice gift bag. The gift bag contains 4 large bags of fairtrade coffee from around the world.

Which one would you rather:
- Receive for Christmas?
- Give as a Christmas gift?
Very often we get so concerned about how a gift looks, that it makes us buy things that aren’t the most practical, or best value.

- Think of a time when you received a gift that looked amazing, but that you were ultimately a little (or a lot) disappointed with.
- Has there been a time when you have given a gift that you were worried about because it didn’t conform to the beautifully packaged formula? Do you know how it was received?

Could you facilitate an honest conversation with the people you spend Christmas with?

- What would you like me to give you as a gift?
- Here is an idea of something that would be useful to me.

**Prayer**

Lord of all people, we thank you for the ability we have to give and receive gifts, ones that cost us much, and ones that cost us nothing. Help us to think carefully about what the people we hold dear would most appreciate from us, not only at Christmas.

Amen
Christmas Unwrapped

“I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone.” Jeremiah 4 v 23

Plastic waste is now high on the political agenda. We have seen the pictures of our oceans clogged with plastic and know that if we are to live sustainably on the planet and curb the catastrophic effects of climate change then we must take drastic action now.

At Christmas we celebrate Jesus coming to bring new life for all, yet sometimes our celebrations are often wasteful and contribute to harming our planet.

- Could you have a Christmas that avoided single-use plastic and disposable items?
- If you tried to, how would your family and friends react?
Honest Conversations

Could you facilitate an honest conversation with the people you spend Christmas with?

You could discuss:

1. Can we agree a spending limit?
2. Could I buy the children an experience (climbing voucher, swimming lesson) instead of a physical gift?
3. If we all bought a little less stuff could we do something special together in the new year? Maybe have a meal, or go for coffee, have a trip to the cinema?

Ideas:

- Use gift bags rather than wrapping paper and keep them to use year after year.
- Give time or experiences rather than gifts that may go unused.
- Look at the disposable items you use throughout the year – cups of coffee, bottles of water, clingfilm, wrapped sandwiches. Could you cut down or stop using them and give gifts of reusable bottles, cups and food boxes?

Prayer

Lord God, you created this planet to nourish and sustain us all. Forgive us when we have been wasteful with the Earth’s resources, too intent on our own ease of use rather than what is sustainable. Help us to think about the choices we make and how we can tread lightly on the Earth.

Amen