

The Archbishops' Christmas Booklet

Anyone seeking to understand the mind of the Church of England in 2020 could not do better than consult *#followthestar*, a booklet of readings and meditations for Christmas sponsored by the Archbishops of York and Canterbury. To say that this booklet is theologically illiterate is to give illiteracy a bad name. It is, of course, achingly politically-correct and displays its impeccable lefty credentials on every page. It is written in the usual patronising, infantilised style we have come to expect from the C. of E. hierarchy: all breathless golly-gosh and Noddy language.

It begins, presumptuously enough, to tell the reader that on every page he will find "a challenge to consider how you might act or live differently." Differently from what? How do Messrs Welby and Cottrell know how we're living? What do they suggest we're doing so badly that we need to reform? Motes and beams, gentlemen: motes and beams.

It begins with some misinformation, telling us that Christmas was "nine months in the making." This blatantly ignores all those prophecies of the Lord's coming in *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah* several hundreds of years earlier. Well, I hope you're managing to enjoy your day, even in Lockdown 2? You won't be enjoying it when you've read the authors' description of life as "hard and demanding." These presumptuous Archbishops tell us confidently: "Joseph felt like that too." That's not what it says in the New Testament, which has Joseph perfectly calm and cheerfully obedient to God's command to marry Mary (Matthew 1:24). This libel on Mary's husband is followed by an impertinent question, asked in that irritating US idiom: "Where do you think God is *right now*?" Then more of the Noddy language as the Christ-child is described as Mary's "little bundle." Are we to imagine she bought his swaddling clothes at *Mothercare Online*?

The question which immediately follows would stump everyone in the pub quiz: "Who are the invisible people around you?" How do I know if they're invisible! Naturally, this is expanded into characteristic lefty divisiveness: "People for whom there is no space in your community?" Who are the booklet's compilers to insinuate judgements about our community? As for the shepherds, they "may have felt awkward, out of place, intimidated." Why write this euphemistic claptrap when St Luke tells it plain? The shepherds were "sore afraid" (Luke 2:9). Then, "God came to dwell in a place of poverty." This piece of socialist spin and propaganda isn't true either, for Joseph was a craftsman following a respectable and remunerative trade. If you will forgive the anachronism, he was of the middle class.

Is the reader meant to *enjoy* being arrogantly patronised? "We pray for those who are lost, whether they know it or not." Noddy rides in again as we are introduced to a "wriggling baby." This booklet's "wise men" were not very wise: "What did they expect Jesus to be like?" Well, according to St Matthew, they knew who they were looking for and their three gifts prove the fact: gold for a king, incense for a god and myrrh for a victim.

I mentioned that this booklet is theologically illiterate. It is also ungrammatical as we are informed that "God is *sat*." Who sat him there then? The Archbishops' English is that of one of the poorer specimens in form 3b.

The baby was "an unexpected visitor." No, the parents had been twice warned: Joseph in a dream (Matthew 1:18-end) and Mary at the Annunciation (Luke 1:30-33). Don't our Archbishops read the

Bible? This is followed by a puzzling reference to “different ages, gender and tribes.” And did the New Testament writers really share one of our age’s ludicrous evasions when speaking about men and women and use the word *gender*? There is a lot more of the same political propaganda: “Teach us to cherish all members of our communities, however different from ourselves.”

Even God himself gets the patronising treatment in this booklet as it is suggested that God really doesn’t know what he is about. The gospel tells us that when Jesus came out of the river after his baptism, God spoke from on high and said. “Thou art my beloved son in whom I am well-pleased” (Mark 1:11). The booklet questions why God should so speak because, “Jesus has not done anything yet.” Except, he is the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, *by whom all things were made*. Did God not know what he was doing when he became flesh? Are we supposed to think that the Father didn’t know what he was talking about?

One banality follows sickeningly upon another in an everlasting series: “God’s presence is invariably marked by joy, kindness and generosity.” Is that how things looked in Gethsemane? At the scourging of Jesus? At the Cross?

Oh, I give up. I can’t wade any further into this sea of banality. There are still a few weeks before Christmas – time for the church authorities to withdraw this rubbish and either replace it with something useful – or maintain a respectful silence.