

FOCUS ON FAITH

TAKING A FRESH LOOK AT CHRISTMAS

I am very grateful to all the ministers and other church leaders who have contributed to the "Prayers of the Week" in the Journal during this past year since we started at Easter. And I'm grateful also to Colin Northway for allowing us the privilege of praying our prayers of blessing over this community and for providing me with the opportunity every month to contribute an article in this column.

I'm especially grateful to the church leaders who over the past few weeks have provided our Advent prayers which personally I've found very thought-provoking.

Preb. Clive Williams, the Rural Dean and Rector of Highley started us off by asking us not to "lose sight of the wonders and delights of each day in our rush to anticipate up-coming celebrations." Revd. Jackie Brown of the People's Evangelical Church reminded us of the need to say "Thank You" for the special Gift of Jesus and Preb. Andy Roberts, Rector of Bridgnorth's Anglican Team Ministry, posed the question "What if Mary had said no?" Just last week Revd. Ray Gill of Bridgnorth Baptist led us in a prayer that we will enjoy real peace – with God, within ourselves and with each other because Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

This was a royal baby....but this wasn't a pomp and ceremony event for a new born King in a palace; there was no media circus recording every last detail, just a few animals to witness a miracle

Probably most of us reading this article have heard the Christmas story many times before but I wonder if we've really grasped the significance of what happened in, what was then, an obscure Middle Eastern country that few people had heard of around 2,000 years ago.

The amazing story of a young girl who is visited by an angel and told that she is to be the mother of God's Son in a miraculous way – no male intervention necessary thank you. The requirement to register in Bethlehem – a trip of

some 100 miles from Nazareth as the crow flies but not as the donkey plods – and of the birth in what was probably a cave that doubled up as shelter for the local pub landlord's animals. As I recently wrote in our Church newsletter, "This was a royal baby – remember Joseph was a descendant of King David – but this wasn't a pomp and ceremony event for a new born King in a palace; there was no media circus recording every last detail, just a few animals to witness a miracle. Sure there was a cast of thousands of angels singing at the tops of their voices but even that was out of town and

only to a few shepherds and yes, later wise men would come to pay homage, but on the whole most people were oblivious to this birth."

But it was a birth that has changed the course of history and one that demands a decision from everyone of us. Jackie Brown reminded us that Jesus didn't stay a baby; He grew to be a man who died on a cross to become the Saviour of the world.

C.S. Lewis said about Jesus, "Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse...You can try to shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and call Him a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

What's your perspective? Baby in a manger; good man who helped people; great orator and people motivator; agitator and political activist; a fool for allowing himself to be crucified; or maybe Son of God?

A couple of years ago I saw this advert, "*This Christmas bring your presence to Jesus – see you in church.*" And perhaps I could paraphrase another advert, "*Jesus is not just for Christmas – He's for life.*" Christmas is a time when many of us go to Church and the Christian churches in the Bridgnorth area extend an invitation to you to join them to celebrate the real reason for this festival.

Go on – put Christ back into your Christmas.

Happy Christmas



Stephen G. Derges
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If you'd like to find out more about the real, radical Christian faith, log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk which has details of local Christian Churches and contact details.