

15. 12. 75

12. 12. 77 (604)

Come Love Carolling ADVENT PREF. II

I'm afraid I don't know how cold it gets around Bethlehem at this time of year, or any other time either. And of course nobody knows for sure exactly when Mary & Joseph came looking for a place to stay where Mary's child could be born. We've had a few days' unusual experience of cold weather here — and how miserable it makes people feel! But we have at home our heaters and warm clothes, or have easily been able to go out and buy some, as thousands of HK people have been doing these days. Not all, though. How really cold was it for Mary & Joseph, unable to find room in Bethlehem's crowded inn?

→ The weather was one thing: people, another. Funny, we use the words 'cold' and 'warm' about people as well as about the weather. The poor inn-keeper has often been cast as a 'bad-guy', turning away two poor people with nowhere else to stay... but there was a census being taken, and there must have been quite a crowd of visitors converging on Bethlehem at that time anyway. Did he perhaps raise his prices, to cash in on the demand?... it's been known to happen, with landlords and shopkeepers, and many other too. Taking advantage of others' misfortune, even when there's absolutely nothing to be gained from them really, is a long-standing human failing, it seems. If you have something, to give or lend, some weight you can pull, someone you know who has some little influence or whatever, then things aren't too bad. But there are always those who have nothing, are powerless, who are (as we say) left out in the cold. No socialist, welfare, or capitalist state is without them, in one form or other,

whatever the official statistics or propaganda may say. And that coldness isn't just the weather-kind. The final run-up to Christmas now (in those cities where it's permitted to celebrate publicly the birth of the whole world's redeemer and saviour) is a time of lights, music, excitement, decorations, greetings, buying, giving and receiving gifts — the first Christmas wasn't at all like that; or at least the crowds & excitement were about something else altogether, the rather vain or bureaucratic whim (whatever way you prefer to look at it) of a powerful emperor who wanted to know how many subjects he had. Perhaps we've "commercialized" Christmas too much (to use that hoary word that seems unfailingly to crop up at this time every year). But that's just you and me and millions like us wanting to greet our friends and loved ones, give them some token of our love, and expecting too to be remembered by them at this time of rightful celebration when we recall God's gift to us and our world. Our temptation is, to forget what it's really all about, and how it all started: to forget, perhaps, about the cold — people's coldness, and our own, who don't see God among us in ordinary human life and welcome Him when He appears anonymously. The lights & gaiety and all the rest can, perhaps, make us forget that, in another way, it's we ourselves who're really out in the cold until Christ came: God's gift, not all our inventions and luxuries, is alone what gives warmth and safety to our hearts & lives, salvation. Let us pray for warmth, not against December winds and cold, but for our hearts and the hearts of all mankind this Christmas. It's not too soon to think about it

RHK
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or to enjoy a simple Christmas song about gifts & giving: the Daughters of the

Cross singing 'The Drummer Boy' MUSIC

PRAYERS

From a poem of Robert Southwell on the Nativity of Christ: "Gift better than himself
 God doth not know; / Gift better than his God, no man can see. / This gift doth
 live the giver given bestow; / Gift to this gift let each receiver be. / God is
 my gift, himself he freely gave me; / God's gift am I, and none but God shall
 have me." As you go shopping, buying gifts for your family, your children, your
 friends, and as you receive with grace the gifts which others give to you this
 Christmas, think of God's gift to you and yours to Him, which all these others
 spring from. For, recognized or not, He is really the 'occasion' of your gifts.
 In giving and receiving, may it be the depth of love in the hands that give and
 receive that you notice most, rather than the value or usefulness of the gift:
 may you give and receive God's love in the coming of Christ to you: His warmth
 and light to take you out of the cold, and to help you to bring others in from
 whatever coldness they find in their lives. May there be room in the inn of
 your life to welcome and shelter those anonymous travellers and visitors of life
 who come to you in their need: may your own enjoyment of Christmas this year
 help you to give of what you have received, joyfully and gracefully, to those
 who have nothing and don't perhaps even know how to ask, or whom. And
 may peace, Christ's peace the angels sang about, come with Him into our
 hearts and our world, still so cold, in these days.