

Come Love Carolling [ADVENT PREFACE]

The Christmas story, as it's told in the first two chapters of St Matthew's and St Luke's gospels raise a lot of questions, and problems. Some people try to find a way of putting the two accounts together, very different though they are: others try to find a rational, historical explanation for all of the very many strange details that occur in the gospel accounts: and others try to explain them away. But even people who don't accept the gospels at all still celebrate Christmas - and there's a whole cultural mythology built around the festival, of other details that aren't in the gospels at all: the cold winter's night, and so on. And Christmas-time remains a warm, comforting occasion. Next year, somebody raises the question of over-commercialisation of the season. But perhaps a more serious threat really is the sentimentalisation (if there is such a horrible word) of Christmas. So: a little background, and maybe a surprise or two. It makes a bit of a difference to appreciate that the Christmas story was not part of the earliest preaching of the Church: the first Christians proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus - then, general reference was added, and later an actual selection of Jesus' words and deeds, his public ministry. It was only read later that Matt. & Luke added, as a kind of prologue, the Christmas story as we read it today. So, really, the Christmas gospels can only be correctly understood when they're read as composed after and in the light of the resurrection experience, by constant reference to the passion & resurrection gospels and the ongoing experience of the early Church. Not too many Christmas songs cover this dimension of the story: but here's one children's song that

does like Easter + Christmas: MUSIC "Sing us a song about Jesus" [Beyond... 1']

PRAYERS

If we allow our understanding of Christmas to be conditioned by ^{all the ideas & interpretations which have grown from the} the influence of ^{readings} Christmas plays, or from the apocryphal gospels, then we will almost certainly remain at the level of comforting emotions, and stay in the ^{realm} world of childish imaginations. But if we consider the birth of Jesus in the light of Easter, then all kind of distortions will be eliminated and we will be able to see the Christmas story in the broader perspective of history as guided by God. Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises: in him God's decisive intervention in history has become "today". Confessing our faith in him is not a private affair (as might easily be concluded from the way we usually celebrate Christmas) but a proclamation to the world.

Another Christmas song now, with Mary, "God will be with me"

MUSIC (Winter's Coming Home 2')

PRAYER [Advs. Pref. II]