

Christmas Questions

How would you react to a sermon composed entirely of questions?

How intrigued are you when the questions refuse to give you answers, leaving you puzzling over the text for yourself?

Are you cross ?

Isn't it the preacher's job to explain things?

Isn't the preacher not doing his or her job properly?

Are you mystified?

How would you react to a sermon composed entirely of questions?

Do you recall the past sermons you have heard over Christmas time?

What were their messages?

Is it easier to remember a sermon you agree with, or a sermon that angers you?

Is it a bad sign that so few come to mind - something to be ashamed of - something not to admit to the Pastor?

Can the Pastor remember his own sermons from a year ago?

Or is the lack of conscious memory a good sign - a sign that they have blurred into one another, blurred into your very self, shaping who you are today?

Or is that a non-question?

Do you recall vividly one particular Christmas sermon that still shapes who you are today?

And what if you were doing it?

What would you say if you were giving a sermon during the Christmas season?

Would you focus on the mangy stable round the back of the Inn which had no room and preach a prophetic message on justice and homelessness?

Would you call to mind the homeless on the cold streets of our cities and liken them to the Messiah Who had no place to lay His head?

Would you tell the story of the Holy Family's desperate escape to Egypt to save their lives from the murderous king Herod, and compare that with the plight of asylum seekers today?

Or is this all too moralistic and grim - worthy, but just a bit too uncomfortable?

What of this Prince of Peace?

Could you preach on that?

Would that go down better than an uncomfortable sermon on the injustices of the world?

Such a needed sermon - but can you find the time to write it - when your own Christmas is so busy - so stressed?

Can the baby Prince of peace bring peace to the preacher - or is he only for others, for those who hear?

Is it hypocritical for the preacher to preach a sermon about something they struggle with in their own life?

Or is it irresponsible to neglect areas you know others need out of cowardice, out of fear of appearing to be a hypocrite?

Would you preach or refrain, refrain or preach?

Are you glad it's not you standing up here now?

What would you say if you were giving a sermon at Christmas time?

Would you look to the wisemen?

Were there three of them?

Were they actually kings?

Why do the carols say one thing and the bible says another?

Does it matter what the preacher says?

Will the congregation notice anyway?

Or will they scour their bibles, spotting the Pastor's inconsistencies and sloppiness?

How much will focus on the exegesis of the text, on the mysterious wisdom that you have crammed from the commentaries?

How much will it be practically applied to people's lives?

But what of the person's life sitting next to me?

Is it the same as mine?

Will a lesson from the shepherds that is so relevant to a man at work in a city office mean anything to a teenage girl at school?

Will an application about the scholarship of the wise men mean anything to a pensioner who left school over six decades ago?

How can these texts be applied to the lives of so wide and varied a group of people?

How can they be applied to my life?

If it was just me - which Christmas text would I be looking at?

Which would challenge me the most?

And what about everyone else here?

What would speak to each one of them?

Which text – wise men?

Shepherds?

Prince of peace?

Stranger in manger?

Word made flesh?

Isn't it the preacher's job to choose?

Why doesn't the preacher give any answers?

How would you react to a sermon composed entirely of questions?

What about the wise men?

Do they endorse astrology, when the rest of the bible seems to be against it?

Or are they a sign that whatever our mistakes and whatever the strange philosophies we experiment with God can find us in them?

Do you read your star sign?

Would you admit it to the Pastor?

Which is more trustworthy - mystic Meg or the Archbishop of Canterbury?

Leo and Libra or the bible and prayer?

Is it all just harmless fun?

Why did the wise men look at the stars anyway?

Am I following a star?

How is God guiding me?

Have I ever resisted His guidance?

Am I comfortable with this talk of God speaking to them and God speaking to me?

How does God speak to me?

How does He speak to you?

What does He say?

What is the star God wants you to follow?

Will He call you on a journey that lasts years like the wise men?

Or a short stroll down the hill like the shepherds?

What about the Frankincense, Myrrh and Gold?

What would Joseph and Mary have made of them?

Are the Jews, Hindus, Romans and half the world right that "incense owns a deity nigh"?

Why do 5 billion people of every race and religion love the stuff and 100 million English – speaking people cough at the faintest whiff?

What would Joseph have made of it?

Or the baby Jesus?

If not with incense, how do I show that I acknowledge Jesus was God?

What does it mean for the baby Jesus to be God?

What does it mean for Creator God to be a tiny baby crying for his mother's milk?

How can God be so small, weak, helpless and vulnerable?

And what of the Gold?

Was that a treasured birthing present kept to adulthood to remind Jesus of these strange visitors to His cradle?

Did it's enduring presence help Jesus know He was special - He was a king with a destiny to save His people?

Or did the Gold rapidly go, on bribes to cross the borders or buying bread in Cairo - keeping Jesus and Joseph and Mary alive when no one else was there to help them?

What is it like to be a refugee running away from a dictator who kills little children?

Can we appreciate their plight when we have so much?

Do we get too many presents at Christmas?

How would our children react if they only got three - Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh?

Myrrh?

What sort of person gives a herbal embalming fluid to a baby at His birth?

Was it because the baby Jesus was born to die?

Does the Church talk too much about death?

Or not enough?

Are you comfortable with the fact that one day you too shall die?

Does faith help you through that truth - or do you come here to escape from that truth?

And what of those for whom Christmas is painful - when death is not the death of Jesus on the cross, but the death of a loved one whose absence is all too noticeable around the festive table?

How do you we preach Christmas to them?

And what of everyone else?

Can one sermon speak to the lives of so wide and varied a group of people?

Which sermon?

Maybe the Shepherds offer a better solution?

Do they call to mind happy memories of childhood nativity plays and two year old sheep going "baaaah"?

Or do you preach on them as rejected outcasts, people forced into a cold smelly job nobody wants, then rejected by the religious establishment because they have no time to be ritually clean?

Is the shepherd's outcast status something that unites us all?

Do we all sometimes feel on the edge, unwanted and rejected by others?

What do we make of a God who picks not millionaires but shepherds?

Or if not shepherds, do you preach on Mother Mary?

What would have happened if she had not said yes to God?

Have you said yes to God?

Were you ever Mary in a Nativity play?

Did you wish you were?

Why is she the most popular one that all the children want to be?

What's wrong with being a sheep - baaaah?

And which Mary would you preach on?

The toddler Mary in the nativity play?

The statuesque Mary of Renaissance art?

Or the teenager, far too young to be a mum, a child with her own child?

Which Mary would you preach on?

Or should you have preached on Joseph?

Are there too few sermons for blokes?

Is that why there are less men than women in Church?

And what of the ultimate bloke - the Word made flesh?

What does it mean for God to be a baby crying for mother?

And what does it mean for me and for you?

Was the Word with God?

Is the Word God? *"and to all who received Him who believed in His name He gave power to be children of God"* - what does that really mean?

Why do the carols bang on about that so much?

"Where meek souls will receive Him still the dear Christ enters in" ... "be born in us today" ... "born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth." What does it all mean?

Has Jesus been born in you?

Have you been born again?

Do you even understand the question?

How would you preach that to people today?

What could you say that would help people understand their need of the Word made flesh?

What events led to you becoming a child of God?

How did you come to believe in His name?

Have you come to believe in His name?

What does that question mean for you?

Would you rather go back to the soft focus nativity play?

Or does the challenge of the homeless Jesus, the asylum seeking Holy Family seem less of a challenge in the light of the challenge to believe in His name, to be born again?

Which would you be more comfortable preaching on?

Which would you rather somebody else had to preach?

Which would you remember if someone else preached?

Why?

After all these questions, would you rather just cut the sermon, give gold frankincense, myrrh or a big fat cheque?

Anything to get it over with?

Do you now need a sermon on the peace that the Prince brings?

Which sermon would you have preached?

And which sermon would you rather have listened too?

And how do you react to a sermon composed entirely of questions?

Did you know that I just asked 146 questions and gave you no answers?

Were you counting?

Did you think of any answers?

Will you download this sermon, print it off and go through all those questions and think of an answer?

Would that be fun or downright boring?

Why would it be fun?

Why would it be boring?

Were the questions too hard?

Were they too easy?

Or are you just not interested?

Will you remember any of these questions by Christmas Day?

Will you remember any of these questions by tomorrow?

Will you remember any of these questions by the time you get to morning tea?

What do you think might happen to you if you took this seriously and spent some time trying answer some of these questions?

What do you think might happen to the Church if every disciple of Christ took some of these questions seriously and genuinely tried to find answers?

Could we perhaps replace all these questions this Christmas with just one?

Could that question simply be: *"Who is Jesus to you this Christmas?"*

So tell me ... I'm dying to know ... how do you react to a sermon composed entirely of questions?

P.S. Make that 175 questions 😊