

Bishop Gregor's Christmas Message

As I write, the clocks have gone back and things are getting darker. People now talk of light deprivation as a medical condition and it does seem that some of us are susceptible to all of that.

But, at this time of the year, there's a lot of extra light around. Crowds of people out shopping and enjoying themselves among the brightly lit streets. Christmas lights and Christmas attractions. And, here in Glasgow, down at the St Enoch Centre, the wooden booths of the Christmas market, gluwain, bratwurst and those wonderful German Christmas robins, like the one I bought a couple of years ago, on sale once more. Wet, grey, dark there of course too, but surrounded by light, colour, life, fun.

It's easy enough, it's fatally easy enough, for Christian people like us, to dismiss all of this as so much tinselly trivia, utterly unrelated to what we like to call the "true meaning of Christmas". Well, if you have thoughts like that, let me try to persuade you this Christmastide to give them up, once and for all.

People like us who will gather at the Christmas eucharist to welcome the true light who lightens everyone coming into the world, have no business being sniffy about people's desire at a dark time of the year to enjoy light and warmth and being together in that light and warmth. We should have the imagination to sense that, however vaguely, this is a very natural, very human, and so ultimately God-given reaching out for something better that lies beyond the often dark and grim realities of the world we live in – and, God knows, they are dark enough.

So, for us, far from being nowhere near the true meaning of Christmas, the Christmas lights in streets, on countless trees, the reindeers and snowmen plastered all over houses or wherever, should point us towards another light. And here's the difference - sometime in January all the Christmas and seasonal lights and all the Christmas and seasonal attractions will disappear, put away for another year. Like many people I hate taking all my own lights and cards and tree down – the house looks so bare – but I ought to remember that the light we have been celebrating in the twelve days of Christmas shines all the year round and can never be taken away or extinguished.

One of the simplest and yet most powerful testimonies I ever heard to this great hope of ours was offered by one of my curates when I was Rector of St Ninian's in Pollokshields on the south side of Glasgow. He was taking some children round that wonderful church and they noticed the white light burning above the altar of the side chapel, where the sacrament of consecrated bread and wine was kept. Why was that light burning away there? Well, he said, it is there to remind us that Jesus the light of the world is always with us so that, even if we came into this big church in the dark we needn't be afraid because Jesus is here, Jesus is with us, the light still burns.

So, this coming Christmastide let's allow ourselves to be pointed once again towards that single, world-changing, all-important truth, the Light of the World. He came into the world all those years

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ago looking for us and He comes into our midst this Christmas on the same quest, to embrace us with joy and wonder so that we may do the very same to Him.

+Gregor