

Beginning or end ?

25 12 11

Almighty God,
you have given us your only-begotten Son
to take our nature upon him
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin:
grant that we, who have been born again
and made your children by adoption and grace,
may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit.

Today's text is from the opening of the gospel according to St John, '**In the beginning**'.

Happy Christmas. At last today, the day, has come. The cards have been sent and received; the decorations are up; the food and drink is bought and stored; and today's Christmas dinner is to come. What we have prepared for, what we have looked forward to, is here – so enjoy. I know I will; I always do.

But as I once more reflected on what Christmas was all about, a question occurred to me: Is Christmas an end or a beginning ?

End it certainly is in the sense that it's what we've been looking forward to for so long: the shops back in England move seamlessly in September from marketing the new school year to advertising Christmas. Here in Dinard, the Mairie had its

workmen out in Levavasseur putting up the Christmas lights as early as November though we had to wait a couple of weeks more for them and the Christmas tree in La Place de la République, itself formed by lights, to be switched on.

Beginning it certainly is in the sense that Christmas is a celebration of a birth, the beginning of a new life. And that birth heralds the birth of a new way of finding God, a fresh revelation of the Word of God in the Word of God. Deeply rooted in Judaism, Jesus the Messiah is the promise of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New. The excitement is palpable.

Back to my question then. Is Christmas an end or a beginning? So, often, we frame things as 'either / or' – things in opposition. They are either this or that. Well sometimes that's true enough. Things can be good or bad; helpful or unhelpful, pretty or pretty awful. But things are not necessarily 'either / or'; things can be 'both / and'. So as I reflected on what Christmas meant to me, I saw Christmas both as a beginning and as an end.

Beginning it is as I said because Christmas marks the beginning of the New Testament, the New Covenant between God and his Chosen People – us, all of us, Jew and Gentile alike, all Mankind, all humanity. Beginning it is in that Christmas marks the birth of a child, the baby Jesus, who will grow from boyhood to manhood. In his life and teaching, Jesus will bring us a fresh vision of the God our Father so that we can be Children of God through the grace of God.

End it is because it is the climax of God's plan for salvation set down before the beginning of time. It is John's particular vision in those wonderful opening verses of his gospel that Jesus whose birth we celebrate today did not suddenly come into existence at this point in time but at the very act of creation, Jesus the Son was with God the Father and it was with the creative word of God, 'Fiat lux, let there be light' that the universe was called into being.

So there we have it: Christmas – an end or a beginning? We should leave it there but first let me leave you with a thought, with a question: 'Is Christmas for you an end or a beginning. Does our Christianity stop with a child in a crib or do we know the man ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist
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H: Sermon 25: Beginning

