

JESUS BORN TO SAVE

(Titus 3.3-8 and Matthew 1.18-25)

Introduction

"All I want for Christmas... is you" was a hit for Mariah Carey in 1994. Or, you might be more familiar with an older song with a similar title. "All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth." Though it sounds like a Count Dracula single it was actually recorded in 1949 by Spike Jones and the City Slickers.

If you have two front teeth missing, I can see why you would want them back tomorrow morning. Getting through your roast turkey calls for a decent set of choppers, but I've always thought wishing for nothing more than a new set of dentures in your stocking is a bit unambitious.

What are you hoping to open on Christmas morning? I asked my family at the dinner table one year and one said "a drum kit" (this was a couple of years before my ear operation). One said "a handbag" (that wasn't me) and one, just to make the others feel guilty said "world peace."

According to xmaselves.co.uk the top 10 presents for boyfriends included a James Bond 007 Gift Set and - listen carefully now - Mary Berry's Complete Cookbook. "Wow, thank you darling, that is just what *you* always wanted!"

Maybe it's progress from 2009 when at £9.95 each, self-stirring mugs were in the top five. Here's what the maker says about them – "The Plain Lazy Self Stirring Mug is the ultimate gift for that person you know who is into DDIY (Don't Do It Yourself)! Simply flick the switch located on the top of the handle and the mechanism will stir your cup of tea for you!" Because it's such an inconvenience to actually get a spoon and stir your PG Tips isn't it?!

What do you *really* want for Christmas? If tomorrow morning you could have anything you liked what would you choose?

The Me I Want to Be

Would you choose a new personality? A new self? Am I content with the John Lambert I have always been?

The real 'me' is my true self, it's who I really am.

But there are other me's as well.

- There's the 'me' I pretend to be
- There's the 'me' I think I should be
- There's the 'me' other people want me to be
- There's the 'me' I don't want to be
- There's also the 'me' that I want other people to see

We usually project the very best version of me there is; the smiling, laughing, popular 'me.' If we use social media, our Facebook profile pictures are the most flattering ones we can find. Most of us like to ensure the public 'me' comes across as happy, intelligent, funny or impressive. The thing is, it's hard to keep this version of me going forever.

There was an army lieutenant who wanted to impress people about how important he was. So when a junior officer knocked on his door he pretended to be on the phone with the Big Cheese so that everyone would know he was a real 'somebody'. "OK, Prime Minister, thank you for calling. You can count on me. Goodbye Sir" and he slammed the receiver down. He then looked up. "Well Private, what do you want?" "I've come to connect your telephone line, Sir."

One of our fears is that the real 'me' will be unmasked - and with good reason. What if every private conversation you've had was secretly recorded by an undercover journalist and put into the public domain by Wikileaks?

The discomfort we feel about disclosing the real 'me' is what the Bible calls 'sin' and that is what Jesus came to sort out. It says he came to save us from it. That's what our Gospel reading means when it says "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Why Jesus Came

Our reading from the letter to Titus tonight talks about another 'me.' It's the 'me' I once was. Or rather it's the 'me' the Apostle Paul says *he* was. And the man he was writing to. And he says "At one time we... were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another."

It's an ugly list but I must honestly say that I would have to plead guilty to everything on that list at some time in my life - and obviously I'm a vicar. That's the 'me' I used to be... And in truth some of that still creeps into the real 'me' now at times.

What about the 'me' that God sees? He sees all your 'me's' at once; your past, your present and your future; he was there before you were born and he knows the moment you will take your last breath. He knows you through and through, he searches the secrets of the heart, from your darkest darkness to the best you can be. But, as Rabbi Aaron once said, "I wish I could love the greatest saint like the Lord loves the greatest sinner." And, oh how he loves you – enough to send his only Son to find you when you are most lost.

After Paul's frank admission about his wretchedness he goes on to explain why God decided to initiate the first Christmas. He says "But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."

Jesus did not come to save the perfect 'me' I want to be
or the ideal 'me' others want me to be,
or the false 'me' I pretend to be,
but the real 'me' – perhaps that's the 'me' I don't want to be, but who I really am when no one is looking.

That's the 'me' God loves. This is the God who is waiting to be discovered anew this Christmas. As C. S. Lewis put, "Look for Christ and you will find him. And with him everything else."

Ending

So when you're opening your Plain Lazy Self Stirring Mug tomorrow - or whatever it is you get - remember that God's Christmas number One is the same tune every year. "All I want for Christmas... is you."