

Christmas 2017

Two new phrases have wormed their way into our vocabulary this year. 'Fake news' and 'post truth'.

They both evoke a desultory state of affairs where truth itself is seen as either a thing of the past and to be confined to the dustbin of history, or as something malleable, to be twisted to suit our own ends and shaped to fit any need at any time.

So there is no such thing as *the* truth, only *my* truth.

Into the darkness of this relativized world we celebrate again the birth of Christ.

Is this fake news? After all, how much do we really know about what happened?

Or is it post truth? Something which used to be important in shaping people's lives and beliefs, but no longer relevant.

Or is it my truth? Quite okay for consenting adults to believe between themselves in the privacy of their own church, but not public truth: not to spoken about in polite society; not qualified to question the public and political issues of the day; and certainly not to be imposed on children.

How do we respond to this?

First, by reminding ourselves (and reminding the world), that there is such a thing as truth. The sky is blue. The sun does rise in the east. Historical figures did exist. Events in history did happen. St Cedd landed in Bradwell in 654. The Normans invaded in 1066. And Spurs last won the FA Cup in 1991 (though, hopefully, that fact will be updated before too long).

Also there are different sorts of truth. There is moral and philosophical truth as well as factual truth.

There is the truth of a poem - not so easy to pin down, but absolutely true in its evocation and description of our deepest feelings and longings, giving words to our deepest desires.

And there is the truth of a recipe, where precision and accuracy are absolutely vital, and how you feel about whether you should put a teaspoon or a tablespoon of salt into the pan really does make a difference.

These are different sorts of truth, but they are both true.

And the truth about Jesus Christ is also two kinds of truth: Jesus was a historical person. He lived and died in 1st Century Palestine. Jesus is also the Lord of history, the Lord of time, the Lord of all. He has been raised from death. Through his Holy Spirit and in his Church he is present with us now.

St Luke gives us the facts and the history. He locates the birth of Jesus within the sweep of history: "in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy..." "in the reign of Caesar Augustus... and when Quirinius was governor of Syria." But St Luke is also the great storyteller, and he recounts

the story not just from the sources he has researched, but also with reference to the Old Testament, drawing on Old Testament prophecies from Isaiah and Micah, and using the poetic forms from other birth narratives to tell the story of this birth. This isn't making it up. It is recognising that this birth was always part of God's plan and was therefore anticipated by all that has gone before.

St John gives us the poetry. He locates the story within the cosmic narrative of the whole creation. His beautiful prologue is a poem: and in the same resonant words with which the whole sweep of scripture embarks – “In the beginning” - John tells of the “word made flesh” – the word – the very purpose and presence of God - that was with God in the beginning, and through whom all things were made, and in whom is light and life, is now made flesh, become human in the person of Jesus Christ.

In Christ there is a new beginning for the world, new hope for every person: that if we receive him we too can be children of God.

The Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ isn't *one* relative, biased, personal truth among many alternatives on the smorgasbord of a post-truth world. It is *the* truth through which all other truths and claims to truth are measured.

It isn't one fact in the world of facts. It is the lens through which all the facts of the universe are examined.

It isn't fake news. It isn't made up to satisfy the restless yearnings of a primitive and gullible people. It isn't opium for the masses, but springs of living water bursting out of barren ground.

It is a story told with reference to other Old Testament stories about how God visits his people and his world. But it enshrines and communicates an historic truth, the truth which is the turning point of history so that for Christians even time itself is measured as 'before' or 'after' this event.

It can't just be my truth. It is either true for everyone or true for no one.

O come, let us adore him

+Stephen Chelmsford
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