

Dear Friends

Christmas, as you know, is not just one day but a season of twelve days. As we are in the very early days of the season it seems appropriate to wish you all a Happy Christmas.

'Away in a manger' is one of the best known and best loved carols in the world. Although no-one really knows who wrote the lyrics or when the lyrics were written the words of the carol express both the joy and the humility of the Christmas story, and they remind us that Jesus was born into a life of simplicity. The words also emphasise the importance of giving and love, two of the most important themes of Christmas. It is indeed a great hymn but one line is just wrong. The line reads:

'Little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.'

Of course he cried. He was a baby, a totally human baby. That's the point. That is the incredible claim Christians make at Christmas: a claim about the soul-stirring, heart-warming, intellectually challenging notion of incarnation, Emmanuel, God with us, God among us in the birth, the child, the man Jesus... God living among us, God teaching us, God showing us what it means to be fully human. God speaking the final word about us through a vulnerable human being. Of course he cried. He cried as a baby because it's what babies do. He cried as a grown man when his friend Lazarus died. He wept over the city of Jerusalem. He cried for us. He died for us.

People all over the world have shed many tears during and after the pandemic. People in the Ukraine and other trouble spots such as Afghanistan, Iran, the Yemen, Syria and Palestine continue to weep. For those of us who are Christians, whilst we too weep for ourselves and for others, we comfort and encourage ourselves with words probably written on the island of Patmos at the end of the first century C.E. by John the Elder:

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

May 2023 be a year when there is less crying and more joy, less hopelessness and more hope, less violence and much more peace.

Every blessing

Allan

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