

WHO IS CRACKERS AT CHRISTMAS?

I have handed out Christmas Crackers. You can take them home as a reminder of my short talk this morning.

Now you may be thinking – Judi is crackers. Let's see.

Christmas has lots of traditions with some more related to the Christmas story than others.

I believe the tradition of the Christmas cracker comes from Britain. How many of you have these crackers when you sit down to lunch, you have to pull them, put on your crown that it contains, ooh and aah over the small gift and then take turns to read the jokes?

But these three things can tell us something about Christmas.

GIFT

Christmas is a time for gift-giving. And the best gift of all is Jesus – God's gift to us. Sometimes we forget what a gift really is.

A gift is a symbol of love, given without demand for anything in return. Unfortunately today, we often think that gifts we receive

are things that we have worked hard for, things we have strived for on our merits, have had to struggle and compete for.

But the Christian faith tells us the opposite. The message of Christmas is that this baby in the manger is God's gift to us because He brings us life in all its fullness, both today and in the eternal life to come.

And we get this gift, not because we deserve it or earn it, but simply through trusting God.

Jesus Christ is the gift we receive through grace.

CROWN

Second there is the crown. Right from the beginning of His life, Jesus is called a King.

But kings aren't born in dark caves used to house animals, kings don't make friends with fishermen and tax collectors, kings aren't killed in a way that Jesus was eventually killed.

So in the Christmas story God is telling us something about what kind of people really matter in the world. It is not just people who live in palaces, have lots of money and are respected by everybody.

What about the shepherds – you may think what a relaxing task that would be – outside caring for sheep, sitting in front of an open fire, stars above to look at.

But shepherds were considered the lowest of the low because of their occupation – they weren't even allowed to worship in the synagogue like everyone else. They were people that everyone thought that God had no time for.

Yet, God sent a great host of Angels in order that they should be the first people to greet the Messiah.

So when you put your crown on today from your cracker, remember that God, the King of the Universe, became unimaginably humble so that we might all be kings through the gift of abundant life.

I have heard it said that God became human so we might become divine.

JOKE

Finally there is the joke – don't worry I won't tell you one. In fact, we think that church is really not the place for jokes.

Yet God gave us the ability to laugh, to have a sense of humour – if it wasn't okay why did He gift us with this?

We often see images of religious people straight laced and stern – very little smiles.

I hope that there will be laughter in your homes today, perhaps some laughter as we share in Jesus' birthday today, because Christmas day is the day when God laughs too.

Look what He did through His love for the funny human beings that He created.

Maybe God laughs at us too as He sees our church seriousness and piety.

There are words written by a mystic Mister Eckhart who says: "When God laughs at the soul and the soul laughs back at God, the Holy Trinity is born.

When the Father laughs at the Son and the Son laughs back at the Father that laughter gives pleasure, that pleasure gives joy, that joy gives love and that love is the Holy Spirit.

I pray that you will experience laughter, pleasure, joy and love this Christmas. .