

## Pick'n'Mix at the Supermarket of Life

- How many of you have braved the **supermarkets** in the last few days?
  - scary!! And it only gets worse each year...
- Everyone running around trying to stock up for the festive season.
- One of the **features of supermarket-style shopping** is that you **pick up only what you want**
  - or at least, that's the theory!
  - I'm sure the shops are always trying to get us to buy more than we really went in for!
- **Pick'n'mix:**
  - you only want nappies for the baby Jesus, a carrot for the donkey, .... **that's fine!**
  - doesn't matter that the person next to you is also doing their main Christmas shop and has made a **completely different selection.**
- **You can choose what you want, reject what you don't:**
  - there is **no right or normal** set of shopping to get;
  - do your own thing - whatever you like.
- Also a **feature of our contemporary society:**
  - **pick'n'mix;** supermarket culture writ large!
- Not just in our shopping habits - but right across every aspect of life.
- We seem able to **choose to believe anything** - and any mix of things!
  - **even if they are mutually contradictory!!**
- To make up a menu of different elements that often don't even go together:
  - a bit of **reincarnation** from here
  - a little **contemporary self-help** or positive thinking from there
  - a trust in the **scientific advances of modern medicine** for health
  - and yet a hankering for something deeper, **morality from somewhere else**
  - **all seasoned with a little religious observance for good measure?**
- That's what Christmas is for many of us - **a little religious seasoning to the pot-luck supper of life!**
- We enjoy the carols, the community feel of singing familiar words with others, perhaps the sense of something more than the shallow realities of daily life, the nice story of the baby and the manger - but its all easily left behind come the 27th of December, when the rush for the sales begins....
- A few years ago I was in a school watching an assembly presented by the children:
  - described different stories of creation from different religions around the world
  - interesting, but begs the question of whether they are true!
- They were presented as all equal - **you believe that, I believe this - after all, we want to be tolerant, don't we?**
- **"Whatever floats your boat" - whatever you feel comfortable with, whatever works for you.**

## Approaching Christmas

- If that's how you approach the Christmas story then there is a problem!
- For that's **not the way the Bible treats the Christmas story:**
  - its not a nice incident that can be plucked out of context, treated on its own, walked away from.
- That's one of the beauties of a traditionally shaped lessons and carols service:
  - **(like "Carols from Kings" in the afternoon)**
  - the various passages read place the narrative, the story, the events of the first Christmas, into their wider Biblical context.
- The picture is **not** a pick'n'mix one!!
  - this is God we are dealing with - ultimate reality - not a choice from a supermarket shelf!

- we can't just take him or leave him!

## The light shines in the darkness

- We sometimes find ourselves dissatisfied with life, feeling like we are stumbling around in darkness, trying to find something that makes sense of the whole thing, that gives meaning to both good and bad times, that gives purpose and direction:
    - I wonder whether that's one reason we are drawn to pick'n'mix in life
      - *"I'll try this and see whether it helps..."*
      - we are groping around, unable to see the big picture, banging into things, sometimes things which seem useful.
  - But we're just **grubbing around in the dark**:
    - the glorious good news of Christmas is that **light has come...**
    - the darkness has been dispelled...
    - that someone hasn't just **stumbled across a torch which can pick out something here and something there - but a glorious dawn has come, revealing the whole shape and purpose of life!**
  - Jesus' birth brought light, the dawn of a new age, and revealed God's love and purpose for humanity.
  - **That's why Christmas is good news:**
    - not because its nice to get together with the family, or to give and receive presents, or even to join and sing carols and hear familiar readings from the Bible
    - but because in Jesus Christ there is light and life, meaning and hope, truth and wholeness - the start of a brand new age!
  - **Will we live in the light? Or turn our back on it? Will we attempt to pick'n'mix the externals of Christmas with all the other perspectives on life we've accumulated along the way, or will we bow the knee to Jesus Christ and find in him life, true life, life in all its fullness, life eternal?**
- Luke 2:19 (GNB): **"Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them."**