

This month's Letter is from Associate Minister Delia Geary

I was reflecting a few weeks ago upon how I experienced Christmas as a child. The excitement building up to the 'big day' was unbelievable and I can remember barely sleeping on Christmas Eve which led to a number of 'complications' for Mum and Dad! Of course, Mum and Dad didn't quite feel the same and I can see why now although I couldn't at the time. In fact I'd get quite upset when because of all the stress leading up to it, they would bicker and argue.

As a child we tend to see everything at face value. We look at the bright lights, the toys in the shops, the countless adverts promising the world, Santa travelling on his sleigh to deliver presents and assume that this is what Christmas is about. This is what we as children can expect. We learn the story of the babe lying in a manger visited by all manner of people and our nativity plays become part of the build up, the excitement. Of course as adults we know that sadly not all children will be able to have the same expectations or experience the same excitement.

The Bible refers to children many times. In Mark 10 Jesus rebukes his disciples for not letting children get close to him, saying:

' "For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them.'

As a child we don't earn love do we? We are hugged, our nappies are changed, our faces are washed and we are clothed not because we've achieved some miraculous feat, but simply because we are loved. It's the same with God. We don't have to earn His love; it is freely given.

Children also have an incredibly open mind. They are curious, questioning, a quality that we lose as we grow to adulthood. As adults we can feel embarrassed about asking questions, thinking that we should know the answers by now. After all, we're grown up! We all wonder about life and it's purpose and in the Christian faith there are many questions. Instead of simply accepting what we are told, God wants us to question; to approach our faith as a child, curious, accepting but also challenging. As a Christian and a lay minister I welcome questions about Christmas and my faith.

We are not asked to have 'blind faith'. In fact, the greatest commandment given to us by Jesus is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.". Note the reference to "mind".

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy and blessed Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Delia Geary