Advent 3. Bright lights

Not many of us will have been into York recently, but now wherever you go there are bright lights. The shops are lit up. Strings of coloured lights festoon the streets. Buildings are floodlit. There are so many illuminations. It is lovely!

People have decorated their homes and put welcome lights in the windows. In our home here, the staff have created a wonderful display for Christmas. At the darkest time of the year we keep the brightest festival. We inherited the idea from the early Britons. I can tell you for a fact though that the Jews loved this Festival of Lights as much as we do. Maybe we inherited it from them. I'll explain.

A few weeks ago the Jews kept the festival of Succoth. In our Lord's day it was their most popular feast, celebrating all that God had given them during the year for the coming winter. It was like Hull Fair and Leeds Carnival rolled into one. It drew huge crowds. Jerusalem was chock-a-block,  and the Temple Courtyard was the main venue.

St. John's gospel (chapter 7) tells us that our Lord's disciples went as a group. Jesus decided to go alone. That was because the Jewish police were hounding him. Picture the scene: a vast courtyard full of people. In the four corners were huge candelabra, fuelled, and ready to be lit. As the darkness falls, the crowd noise quietens, and people become expectant. They are waiting for the show to begin. Then suddenly there is a blaze of light from the great candelabra. Above the oohs and aahs, Jesus shouts, "I am the light of the world!". His voice echoes around the Temple court and precincts…

That was a moment of high drama. It underlined something which Jesus had been teaching. He was God's light. A promised light.  A light to lift people's hearts and minds. To set their hands clapping and their feet tapping. Jesus made the most of the opportunity. He drove home his message. "**I am the light of the world".**That was stunning.

We can learn a lot from Jesus. He didn't hesitate to jump on a bandwagon. Christians today should be part of the bandwagon provided by a secular and commercialised society. The stores and shops, the television adverts, all began their Christmas two months ago. The lights came on as the clocks changed. That's the time when they pull out the stops, brighten life with tinsel and the trappings of the festive season, and turn on the carols of course, with Bing Crosby singing "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas".

Some would say it's wrong for Christians to anticipate Christmas. Part of me agrees with that. We can still keep our Advent preparation for Christmas within the church community. **But our task is to put the Christian story into the secular arena**. To show that the child, whose birthday we are celebrating at this time of the year, belongs to us all. He is one of us. He shows us that God is involved in all our concerns - the secular and the sacred. He shares the ups and downs of life with us. That makes a difference.

If we believe that Jesus is the world's true and guiding light, then let's show it wherever and whenever we can.

Even here in our care home, where the staff have done such a fine job in lighting us up, it's not just for our delight and entertainment. The reality behind it is that we are remembering that Jesus is the light of the world for everyone. For us all.