

2016 - International Year of Pulses and the Rio de Janeiro Olympics.

I recently sat sipping coffee in a café where a dozen fairly elderly people were full of beans (Year of Pulses!) and celebrating life (Rio de Janeiro: carnivals and beaches). The jokes passing between them were terrible but the enjoyment of one another's company was genuine enough. In fact, they seemed determined to make the best of the occasion, like children at a birthday party.

Following on from Christmas, is Epiphany, when sages' wisdom led them to discover a new life and a new hope - the babe in a manger. I wonder if they considered why God didn't just slip into the world as a fully formed grown-up Jesus; after all, it would have made no difference to the end result. Come to that, why could not the Divine plan have us all come into existence fully formed and functioning? ("Little Bangs" from a "Big Bang" theory...)

Nothing about life, as it appears to be designed, seems to be by coincidence. We are born vulnerable, needing to learn, discover, trust, be hurt, recover as best we can. The memory of knowing what it is like to grow physically helps us understand the world around us. It demonstrates the relentless nature of things: change. Without change we wouldn't be able to see that what is good does not change. From that comes spiritual growth - to love because we are loved.

Innocent fun, unprejudiced acceptance of others, awe of creation - the expression of childhood - tend to be the sum of our wisdom. All the knowledge of the magi brought them to wonder again, that the way *of* God is profoundly simple, like our common beginning. The way *to* God has already been achieved and laid before us, so accept it.

I think the collective wisdom of the oldies in the café, freed (for a while at least) from whatever worries the world might otherwise bring, had intuitively achieved what Jesus, in his adulthood, had commended: "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." *[Mark 10.15]*

Our lives have already had what is necessary for the new year to be a new beginning. God has given and God will in due course take away; in the intervening period, blessed be the child within you, that that child may be alive and well to enter the kingdom of God when required.

Appropriate, then, overlooking Rio de Janeiro, where they know how to rejoice in creation and one another, is a 130ft-tall reminder of the promise of God: Christ the Redeemer - who is also Christ the Child.