

## **God's Blasphemy?**

*Isaiah 527-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 11-4; John 11-14*

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us... full of grace and truth.  
(John 11<sup>4</sup>)*

James Anstice walked out of court on the 24th January 2005 with a twelve month conditional discharge, paying £100 compensation and £55 costs. He had, on the 12th December 2004 walked into Madame Tussauds and, in the very gentle way that James would, vandalised the Nativity scene that featured David and Victoria Beckham as Joseph and Mary, and featured Tony Blair, the Duke of Edinburgh and President George Bush as the three wise men, and Kylie Minogue as an angel. He waited until no children were present and then took a swipe at the figures with his rolled up umbrella. He did it because he was incensed by what he perceived as the blasphemy of the scene. I knew about it on the 23rd January, over lunch in school where he taught law and I was chaplain, when James asked what he should do and if I thought he should tell the Head Master before the hearing? The school was as sympathetic as the court!

My family often accuse me of being grumpy in the run up to Christmas and I am guilty of the odd rant or two along the way at any attempt to placate the loonies who think that religious festivals should be diluted to inoffensive meaninglessness, but I have not, as yet, violently addressed any of the apparent blasphemy surrounding Christmas.

But Christmas itself could be perceived to be blasphemous! Didn't God himself say that you shouldn't make an image of God! Yet, that is what Jesus is: **he is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being!**

That, of course, is in keeping with the real Christmas - one that breaks all the rules. Virgins don't give birth - but Mary did; men who are engaged to women who get pregnant by another chap don't tend to marry them - but Joseph did; foreign potentates don't make a habit of kneeling in obeisance, but the Magi did.

God gets off with the charge of blasphemy because Jesus isn't a copy, he is the genuine article: he is God - **the word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.**

To the Jews, to whom Jesus came as the Messiah, the Incarnation offended everything they held to be true about God: God, who is unseen, becomes visible; God, who is eternal, is held within time; God, who is somewhere else, is here!

It is the genuine that lasts.

A few days prior to the vandalism (and one of things that added to it happening) Madame Tussauds had announced that the 'celebrity nativity' was to be repeated every year (despite the fact that they had done what nothing else could - united all branches of the Church in agreeing on something together that this was inappropriate). A rather clever, if bumbling, school master managed to change that.

What we celebrate is that a baby - a rather special one - changed this world and did so by rejecting revolution and doing so by love and forgiveness.