Planning for a Greener Christmas

*“And the Word became flesh and lived among us … “* John 1:14

Yes, I do realise that this is the November magazine and that we haven’t even got to Advent yet. Like many of you, perhaps, my heart sinks a little when, sometimes as early as September, I start to see Christmas merchandising appearing in the shops and on our screens. Hmm. Don’t misunderstand me: I LOVE Christmas, for all sorts of reasons: family gatherings, singing carols, the lights on Christmas trees and, of course, the special significance of Christmas worship. But it is so easy to get carried along in the commercialisation of it all and, in doing so, to lose sight of the values we try to live by the rest of the year. I’m thinking here particularly of Creation Care and Climate Justice. Yet with a little forward planning (which is why I am writing this in November) we might find that we celebrate the festival in a way that does as little harm as possible to creation, and perhaps even does some good.

So, here are a few suggestions for a Greener Christmas:

* Real trees are more environmentally friendly than artificial ones. If you buy one, get one that was grown as locally as possible AND make sure that it is recycled.
* If you have children who like Advent Calendars, go for a reusable one that can come out year after year. Most of the shop sold ones can’t be recycled.
* Gifts: buying something new should probably be the last resort! If you have to go this route, try to make sure that what you buy is Fairtrade and/or ethically produced AND that the recipient actually wants it! You may be able to find gift items in charity shops or on local ‘free’ sites. You might make some gifts for family and friends, using your baking or crafting skills. You might give a promise of some of your time as a gift – to babysit, walk the dog, cook somebody a meal etc
* Gift wrapping can be made SO much greener. Make reusable cloth gift bags. Wrap items in brown paper and add coloured (reusable) string or ribbons. (Most wrapping paper – especially the glittery stuff – can’t be recycled, and neither can Sellotape.
* Christmas cards: why send them to people you will see over Christmas? You can give them your Christmas wishes in person. Consider sending e-cards to people you know will enjoy them. If you are going to send ‘real’ cards, look for the ‘FSC’ mark which shows they have been sustainably produced, but from charities AND *avoid the glittery ones.*
* Shared meals can be a wonderful part of Christmas celebrations. Plan meals carefully to avoid over-catering and the food waste that will inevitably follow otherwise. Food waste that goes into landfill produces large quantities of methane, that powerful global warming gas. Try to eat less meat (the production of which often does a lot of damage to both the climate and the environment), or try one of the many delicious plant based options as the centrepiece of one of your meals over the Christmas season.
* Christmas Crackers: do you really need them? Most of the contents will end up in the bin by the end of the day.
* Wine: if this is part of your celebration, then go for wines produced in Europe. One that are produced much further afield will have an enormous carbon footprint because of the distance they have travelled.

Christmas is a celebration of ‘the Word made flesh’, of God taking on physical form and coming to live amongst us on this precious planet. The incarnation of God in Christ tells us – amongst so many other things – that ‘matter matters’, that this earth and all that lives on it is important to God. So as we celebrate Christmas, let’s try to do it in a way that really honours creation.

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