

CHRISTMAS DAY 2019

They say that nostalgia ‘isn’t what it used to be’ but it’s a perennial attraction. Here’s a taste of it in Peter Hennessy’s account of the 1950s through the lens, literally, of a film, made in Blackpool by British Transport Films, called ‘Holiday’ – you get the idea already.

A whistle sounds. Unseen a steam train rattles, brakes and squeals to a halt. The first shot is of holidaymakers alighting in the sunshine in great numbers and lugging suitcases along platforms 11 & 12 of Blackpool Station. The men are dressed in jackets over open-necked shirts, the women are in flowery summer dresses and their children wear smaller versions of the same.

And so to the beach and the various shows featuring Arthur Askey, Tommy Cooper and Morecambe and Wise; and jazz and big bands and a world of whelks and hot dogs and onions:

All ages are holidaying together. Grans and Granddads seated in the sea-front shelters write on picture postcards while their grandchildren look on. Boys with home-made go-carts wait for new arrivals outside the railway station to carry luggage to the boarding houses for a bob or two.

And so on, I can almost smell the sand and the seaweed, the steam and the Brylcreem. It’s a picture of Britain at peace after war. And yet looming over it all, the ‘H’ bomb and the very real threat of nuclear war and economic and imperial decline. It was a period, perhaps, of much-needed denial.

And we can do this with Christmas. It’s here as a much-needed break from the awfulness of the disintegrating world around us, but it’s also a reminder that the Christ-child is not merely a bit-part player in a holiday scene, here to evoke past memories only. In today’s readings, we leave the world of Matthew and Luke behind us and enter the strange territory of Hebrews and John. This isn’t about nostalgia, now, but a wake-up call to who we are really dealing with: this is God made man; the Wisdom of the Word made flesh; the world presented to us as sacrament, a place of the Holy, a planet and a people to be respected – cared for, loved. And we have here, too, the promise of God’s presence and power with us always.

So let’s leave the tinsel behind now, and use this presence and power – or rather, *be* used by it – to do for us what’s becoming increasingly obvious we cannot do for ourselves.

Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received grace upon grace.

Where else can we go? To whom can we go but Christ?

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