



# CNI

## **FAITH FOCUS - Daring to look the Christ Child in the face**

Thanks to the internet and i-Pad we keep in frequent contact with our grandsons abroad. One is aged five coming on eighty, and the other is just eight months but already a firm fixture with his own character traits. I have immense esteem for the parenting skills of their mum and dad and especially in response to the five year olds incessant and intelligent interrogation.

These two lads are amongst the most fortunate in the world. They have parents who love them and care for them responsibly. They have good shelter, warmth, food, superb medical and health care. Having been involved for thirty some years in developing my denomination's appeal for Christian Aid and similar agencies, I

[churchnewsireland@gmail.com](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.com)

have a fairly informed background on children who have not got these basic assets which we take for granted.

Two weeks ago I was outlining a talk on Advent when I was stopped in my tracks by a BBC News report by Fergal Keane. A superb television reporter, he employs an economy of words. His succinct comment is well researched. He has the confidence to let the camera tell the story at critical points without a spoken commentary.

In a week when tragic events in Aleppo and Mosul dominated, Fergal was in Yemen where an internal war has been going on. He showed children who had been badly hurt by aerial bombing. Limbs lost and little possible in hospital care. Orphan children telling of their parents' and siblings' deaths. We saw again the effects of starvation. The small rib cages stretching the flesh of the children.

I had to put down the draft for my talk on Advent. Two mental images were colliding in my head. One was seeing the faces of my own grandsons superimposed on those images of the Yemeni children. And the other was of the cherubic images of the Christ child which I would be seeing in the nativity scenes over Christmas.

In my draft I had been highlighting an aspect of the Advent season which I feel has wrongly been submerged in commercialised calendars and too premature Christmas tree festivals and carol services.

I was raised with the teaching that the four Sundays of this 40 day season of repentance and preparation were specifically to address the great basic themes of the Jewish-Christian faith-salvation story, namely — Heaven, Hell, Death and Judgment.

No wonder many avoid this challenge. These are indeed mighty issues and themes which lie at

the very core of the scriptures and salvation itself. Its hard to accept that the child in the manger has come into the world to be our judge.

The manger scene has excited the response of the greatest of artists like El Greco. It has inspired writers like Christina Rossetti with her, "In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, earth stood still as iron, water like a stone . . .". Each word is a jewel. Now sing it to the melody by Holst and let your heart melt within you. Isn't that the ultimate Christmas feeling?

More than niggling me this Advent is that the Child of Bethlehem later highlighted our responsibility to the folk around us. "Lord", they asked, "when did we see you hungry..." His reply included the insight, "When you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me". The question facing me this Christmas is - Have I the courage and the faith to look into the face of Christ at Christmas knowing that I will see the

faces of the children of the Yemen, Mosul and Aleppo?

*Houston McKelvey - first published in the  
News Letter December 18, 2016*