

I choose to approach the subject of Christmas by looking back on how my perception & experience developed, something I can do a bit more clearly in the light of my knowledge about autism. I need to start from my early childhood, when I had no knowledge of being autistic, a situation that was to continue till I was 52.

Although Dad was *de facto* agnostic, he allowed Mum to bring us up as Catholics, so I learned both Christmas stories, the Baby in Bethlehem & Father Christmas. As an ASC I had no trouble believing.

At the age of five, the little school taught us Christmas songs. The 1st one was “the 12 days of Christmas,” a good exercise in maths, a subject I liked. We then learned various popular carols, not all of which would be used in Church. I like music & singing, so I could get into it straightaway.

The presents were quite lavish. Part I was in our bedrooms with little presents from Santa in a pillowcase we left out. Part II was with the whole family under the tree for the big presents. We were taught to list the donors & gifts to get thankyou letters right. This makes sense, given the ASC desire for order, but it took away some of the spontaneous enjoyment.

When 6 or 7, on a summer day walking back from school, I wondered if the tooth fairy & Santa Claus were my parents, as it seemed a logical possibility. My mother answered the question & I thought I’d been clever.

As I got older, the main problem I noticed with Christmas was Dad’s behaviour. He seemed workaholic as well as a problem drinker. Most Saturday mornings he was in the office, unless he away sailing or shooting. On Sundays he lay in while we went to Church, but on Christmas Day he lay in long & we had to wait till he was ready before opening the presents. While I wanted to play, he would take the family on a round to visit his drinking friends. We then got back late for lunch & I was tired & hungry, having been bored during the visits. I realise now that the unpredictable timing impacted me more than my NT peers.

In my teens, my body clock was like an owl, so I got to prefer Church at midnight. Through midlife, my body clock become more like a lark, so my preferred priestly Christmas duties are to take service early evening Christmas Eve, then Christmas dawn & Christmas Day.

When I studied theology, it took a while to come to terms with the fact many details in infancy narratives & genealogies present theology rather than records from Joseph’s or Mary’s diary, but I now appreciate Mt seeing Christ fulfilling history from Abraham, Luke seeing Christ for whole human race & Jn going back to the divine Word made flesh. It doesn’t matter if Mt presents Mary & Joseph living beforehand in Bethlehem, while in Lk they start in Nazareth.

My main struggle with Christmas this year was not knowing until very recently whether I’ll be invited to Christmas lunch. I’m extrovert by nature & like planning well in advance how & when to spend time with others.

The other is shopping. As I don’t believe in wasteful spending sprees, I accumulate stuff from charity shops at quieter times during the year + unused presents & then give them out at Christmas. Due to my domestic problems this year & the likelihood of moving in Jan, I haven’t done much shopping, so the presents will be slim.