

Tony writes...



Dear friends,

What are the odds; what is the probability that the Christmas story is true?

Imagine doing a random poll, asking people whether they really believed that the wonderful story of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, not to mention shepherds, angels and wise men, actually happened? The majority of people would probably admit that it is a beautiful story and part of our heritage, but that it is highly improbable that it actually happened like that. It's a fairy tale, which we love to hear at Christmas, but for the other 364 days in the year we live in the real world, not the world of fairy tales. Is that what you think?

O.K. Let's phrase the question in a different way. Lay aside the details of the story for a moment. Can we believe the truth that the story contains? What are the odds that at a definite point in history, just over 2,000 years ago, God became human? How probable is that? Don't we know too much these days to believe that? Our galaxy, The Milky Way, comprises about 100 million stars and there are 200 billion or so galaxies in the universe. Why should this tiny planet of ours be of any significance in the great scheme of things? The odds would seem to be more favourable of you or me winning the lottery, than of God revealing himself in Jesus Christ on our little planet Earth. And why should God bother with human beings, anyway? We've only been around for a blink of an eye in the history of Earth, let alone the history of the universe.

I know I'm being a bit of a devil's advocate here and it's not my intention to ruin the Christmas joy, but I would suggest to you that it is these nagging doubts, this overpowering improbability, which undermines what we Christians celebrate at this time of year and indeed what people of faith believe at any time of year. Many people in this world of ours will ask how we can continue to believe something so improbable? What answer do we give them?

I would like to contend that life is far more than a series of probabilities. Science thrives on probabilities, on what is likely to happen in given circumstances, but faith and hope look beyond. How many improbable events have taken place? The fact that we are here as human beings, against all the odds of evolution and natural selection, is in itself pretty remarkable. And what of the improbable events of our own lifetime? Hitler was defeated. Marxism, so strong and powerful, was swept away with the Berlin Wall. Apartheid came to an end in South Africa. Just over 60 years after the Wright Brothers first flew into the air, we managed to travel to the Moon. We have transplanted organs, found a cure for AIDS, talk face to face with friends the other side of the world on a tiny hand-held device. These are the modern-day miracles and wonders, but who could have predicted them? Sometimes, amazing things do happen against all the odds. In that lies our hope and our ability to dream impossible dreams.

So, yes, the incarnation of Christ, the true message of Christmas, does on the face of it seem improbable, but that does not necessarily mean we cannot believe. Unlikely as it may seem, we believe that the wonderful One who made the galaxies (and made an amazing, awe-inspiring job of it) has chosen to take a particular interest in this little speck of elemental matter, which happens to be our home. More than that, the great Source and Giver of All Life has chosen to love what he has made and above all, for some unfathomable reason, to love these amazing but troublesome creatures called human beings. He might have chosen otherwise, but he didn't. "God so loved the cosmos, that he gave his only Son," an eternally-beloved part of himself, that we might know what it means to truly live. Choice breaks through chance and probability, cuts through the odds. God is not limited by what we believe to be probable. **The fact that God chooses means that it can happen and we can dare to believe.**

Love and joy to you all this Christmas from Caroline, Jonny, Charlotte and me,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tony". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end.