

## A Reflection for Christmas Day 2021

“It’s the greatest story ever told.” How many times have you heard those words over the past few days? I’ve heard them on the radio, on TV, in adverts, read them in magazines and books. “Oh, Christmas – It’s the greatest story ever told.” It’s up there along with White Christmas and The Snowman and all the other stories that it just wouldn’t be Christmas without. And it’s just a teeny weeny bit better even.

Well it’s a whole lot better, an indescribable amount better – not because it’s more action packed, not that it’s got more jokes, more suspense, more romance, or any of the other things that make a story good, but because it’s REAL – and it’s about everybody’s lives, yours and mine and everybody else’s. Beyond that, it’s very simple: In a sentence it’s

*God came from heaven to take on our human form to show us just how much God loves us.*

That’s just about it.

Well, maybe there’s a little more, but that’s more or less the core of it. When God looked at humanity and realized how dark and difficult our days could be, how confused we get about our identity and place, how many painful things we do to each other out of that confusion and insecurity, He decided to do something about it. And so after giving the law and sending the prophets, He got involved in a whole new way. Personally, intimately involved with his fallen creation.

But please notice: when God decided to get personally involved, He didn’t come to punish, or frighten, or scold, or threaten, or any of the other things that are sometimes attributed to Him. Instead, He came to tell us that we are loved, deeply, truly, and forever.

And just to make sure we got the point, God first brought that message embodied in the flesh by Jesus to people the world was pretty sure weren’t particularly important or, for that matter, loved: insignificant ‘nobody’ shepherds, an unwed teenage mum, astrologers practicing a completely different religion. All of this to show that God wasn’t going to leave anyone behind. That God’s message of love was for all. As in *everyone*, whether the world thought you were important or lovable or not.

And that’s still the way it is. God loves *all* of us, but God especially wants those who don’t feel loved or lovable, those who feel like they’re on the outside looking in, those who feel forgotten, and those who wonder what the point of life is, to hear the “good news of great joy” that God loves **all** of us.

Which is why I want to keep it simple this morning. Because after all the shopping and cleaning and cooking and preparing.... Or, for that matter - (and we sometimes we forget this side of things) - after all the trying to make ends

meet, worrying who we'll be able to see over Christmas – if anyone, struggling with fraught relationships, with Covid, after all the stuff that makes our lives a bit crazy, I think the short, simple, and peaceful phrase that we are of infinite value and worth to God is perhaps the simple word we need to hear this Christmas.

And if you *really* want to keep it simple, you could probably reduce the Christmas message even further, picking up the two words of the angels' song that capture the heart of the Christian message: "for you." Notice it's not just that Jesus is born, but the angels say, "Jesus is born *for you*." And it's not just "good news," in general, but it's "good news of great joy *for you* and all people." For while the Gospel is never a *private* word, it is nevertheless a very *personal* word, reminding each and every one of us that God believes we are worthy of honour and dignity and, above all else, love.

It's that love that has made sense of everything we've tried to do together as baptized Christians this year. It's that love that has been at the very heart of every christening, every wedding, every renewal of marriage vows and every wedding anniversary celebration, every funeral. It is that love of God in Jesus for you, for me, for every man, woman and child, that we celebrate today.

For me, John Betjeman summed it up most beautifully in his well-known poem, *Christmas*:

*And is it true? and is it true?  
The most tremendous tale of all,  
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,  
A Baby in an ox's stall?  
The Maker of the stars and sea  
Become a Child on earth for me?*

*And is it true? For if it is,  
No loving fingers tying strings  
Around those tissued fripperies,  
The sweet and silly Christmas things,  
Bath salts and inexpensive scent  
And hideous tie so kindly meant.*

*No love that in a family dwells,  
No carolling in frosty air,  
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells  
Can with this single Truth compare -  
That God was Man in Palestine  
And lives to-day in Bread and Wine.*

May you know the fathomless love of God in Christ for *you* - as for all people - this Christmas.