

Christmas Day 2025; Benefice Holy Communion, Gilling

Today on Christmas morning I come to the final topic in my series of Advent sermons and reflections on God's gifts; we have had peace, joy, blessing, grace, and now today we have Love.

Today we remember and give thanksgiving for God coming from heaven to take on our human form, lying in a manger to reveal to us His love. God got involved, personally and intimately with His fallen creation. But when God decided to get personally involved, He didn't come to punish, or frighten, or scold, or threaten, or reject or any of the other things that are sometimes attributed to Him (sometimes even by people in the church, who also demonstrate similar attributes to one another!). Instead, God came to tell us that we are loved, deeply, truly, and forever. 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; shepherds, who were considered no better than common criminals, an unwed teenage mother who under the Law would be stoned to death, travelling astrologers who were considered foreign Gentiles who practised different religion. All of this was to show that God wasn't going to leave anyone behind, that His message of love was for all, whether the world thought you were important or lovable or not.

Sometimes we focus on the giving and receiving of gifts ourselves, that we miss the fact that what we are celebrating at this time of the year is God's gift to us; the unimaginably generous gift that God gave to us at the first Christmas - the gift of Love in His Son. This gift from God is for all people - no one is excluded. It is a gift given out of extreme love - a love so immense, so deep, so wonderful and powerful that we can hardly begin to fathom

what kind of love it is that would cause God - the ruler and creator of everything - the supreme power that holds the universe together - to become a vulnerable and helpless baby born to human parents, subject to the laws of nature and the laws of mankind, and to come into this world in such a way that is hardly believable. God came from heaven to earth to the sound of a mother crying out in childbirth in a stable; his first bed was a manger; his first visitors' strangers.

So much does God loves all of us, but especially He desires those who don't feel loved or lovable, those who regularly feel like they're on the outside looking in, those who feel forgotten, rejected and those who wonder what the point of life is. For them as well as all of us, was given the "good news of great joy" that God loves all of us.

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 one of us that God believes we are worthy of honour and dignity and, above all else, love.

But this is Love that needs a response. The shepherds responded by going to Bethlehem to investigate the matter, and then, on finding Jesus, by praising God for all they had heard and seen. Let me encourage you to investigate and receive the wonder of God's love for you and then to return to your homes, communities, and workplaces, and to the world all about you, praising God for all you have heard, seen, and been given, because of Love.

Thanks be to God. Amen.