

# Christmas

Dear Friends,

Christina Rossetti wrote a poem that begins, 'Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, love divine; love was born at Christmas, stars and angels gave the sign.' I would hope that we could all agree that love is the most important thing in life. If we can agree on that, my next question is, 'Where does love ultimately come from?' As a Christian I believe that Jesus points us to the belief that love comes from God, that love is essentially God's gift to us. I believe that Jesus shows us that God loves each one of us in equal measure, that he shows no partiality. Remember the story Jesus told about the farmer who paid each of his labourers the same at the end of the day, both those who had worked all day and those who had only worked for a short part of the day? (Matthew 20: 1-16)

Love came down in a special way at Christmas, because Jesus showed us both the greatness of God's love for us and the way to love. There is greatness in God's willingness constantly to seek us in order to give us hope and restore us to new life (Luke 15: 3-7), and there is greatness in God in Christ's being willing to suffer and die in order to show his solidarity with us when we are faced with suffering and death. In the Bible we see time and again how Jesus shows us the way to love. He shows us that real love asks us to reach out in service to others, service that is humble and not self-advertising. And he shows us that our priority should always go to those in greatest need, reminding us that love should never be restricted to those whom we love, those who love us, or those from whom we may hope to gain something (Luke 14: 12-14).

When love came down that first Christmas God showed us in the manner of Jesus' birth a lot about the nature of his love. Joseph and Mary were like homeless refugees today, people without a place to lay their weary heads. The only place they found in which Mary could give birth was a stable. And the first people the angels of God directed to the stable were a group of shepherds, people whom society then and now tends to hold in low esteem. Surely this tells us that, although God loves each of us equally, God is especially concerned with those living on the edge, those who are suffering, those in great need.

Christmas is thus a celebration of love: God's love for us and God's hope that we give thanks for that love by seeking to love in the way that Jesus showed us. If we can take this to heart, the so-called spirit of Christmas is something that we should seek to channel not just at this season, but throughout the year. And we can do so if we study the life of Jesus, just as the wise men studied the stars, and if we seek Jesus in prayer in order to find the strength and the wisdom we need to live out in our own lives the love he has given us.

May the love of Christmas be with you now and always.

Charles Brown

Priest, Crowland Parish