

GOD WANTS YOUR LOVE

'In the beginning there was a pregnant girl – not married – who said she had seen an angel'. That's where Christmas began. It began with one girl and a baby.

Today, however, for most people Christmas is not about a girl and a baby.

For many it's about shopping. Did you know that:

- the average person takes 15 hours to complete their Christmas shopping?
- the average amount spent by parents on each of their children is £262?
- the amount wasted this Christmas on unwanted gifts will come to £1.2 billion?

For others it's about eating Brussel sprouts. Did you know that:

- £30 million is spent each Christmas on Brussel sprouts?
- In the week before Christmas people in Britain will buy 4 billion sprouts?
- Over Christmas each one of us will eat on average 14 Brussel sprouts?

For children it's about Father Christmas. Did you know that:

- 85% of four year-old children believe in Father Christmas?
- Children in Britain send 750'000 letters to Father Christmas each year?
- On Christmas Eve Father Christmas has to visit 832 homes every second to deliver all his presents?

But the truth is that Christmas is about a girl and a baby – its about Mary and Jesus. It's about God coming into our world. It's about God wanting your love.

In the words of the last reading: *“The story about him being born in Bethlehem is either true or a terrible lie. If it is true, then he wants your love”.*

God wants your love.

We are often told that God loves us. In the words of the most famous verse in the Bible: **“God loved the world so much that he gave his Son”.**

We see God's love in the stable at Bethlehem.

We see God's love on the Cross of Calvary.

Yes, God loves us – he loves you.

But he also wants our love – he wants your love.

He wants you to respond to his love – not because it will make him feel good, but because he wants your good. For when we respond to his love, we discover the joy and security which come from being a child of God.

But love can never force love – love can only wait.

I remember years ago, when I first met Caroline, I knew that she was the girl for me.

But it took some time before she knew that she was the girl for me.

I loved her before she loved me – and it took some time for her to respond

I remember how she went away for a long summer holiday with her parents, and she didn't even bother to send me a card.

I had to wait till she came to her senses!

God loves each one of us. We see that at Bethlehem.
He too is waiting – waiting for us to come to our senses.
Waiting for us to love him too.

“God is love”, wrote John. “And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him” (1 John 5.8,9)

God loves us. And he wants our love. That’s what Christmas is really about.

- The Brussel sprouts and all the trimmings of Christmas are but a side-show.
- Indeed, even this carol service is but a side-show compared to the real thing.

Sadly many people are missing out on the real

True, at Christmas congregations on average increase by 220% - but by the time Christmas Day is over, the congregations have dropped again.

They sing the familiar carols – they listen to the familiar readings – but somehow the penny fails to drop that not only does God love them, he want them to love him too.

But love cannot be forced

Sometimes we need time to realise that God really does love us

Although for some couples its love at first sight, others need time for love to develop.

In Caroline’s case, for instance, she needed time to be convinced that I loved her – and that my love for her was not such a bad thing after all.

It may be that some of you here tonight need time to explore whether the story of Bethlehem is true – or for that matter, whether the stories of Good Friday and of Easter Day are true. For they are either true, or they are a terrible lie.

In this church we run Alpha courses: our next Alpha course begins on Monday 14 January – and for 10 weeks we shall come together every Monday to explore who Jesus is, and what difference he can make to our lives.

We begin with a two-course meal at 7 pm. We then have a presentation at 8 pm – which is then followed by an hour or so of discussion.

Alpha is for people wanting to explore whether or not Jesus is the key to the meaning of life.

We are also running a shortened variation of our Alpha course on a Monday lunch-time called Food for Thought

Yes, some people need time to reflect on what God has done for them

On the other hand, if the truth be told, some of you have had plenty of time

Maybe you’ve been coming to these carols services for years

You’ve had the story of God’s love for you, year in, and year out.

Your need is not to go on an Alpha course – but to make a response to God’s love now.

To say to God tonight: *‘God, its taken me a while, but now I really do realise how much you love me – and I want to tell you I love you too. Thank you for Jesus – thank you that because of him I can have a new start of life – thank you that in him I can experience a life that will never end. Lord, I want to put my trust in Jesus – I want to follow him – and discover the difference that he makes. So help me God’.*

We would love to help you make that response.

Immediately after the service, there will be people in the area under the cross ready to pray with you and for you.

Or, if you would prefer, you can mark the card you have been given: “I want to respond to God’s love and want to know more about following Jesus”.

Either I or one of my colleagues would to then see you and talk things through with you.

Or if you feel you are not ready to make that response, then why not come on an Alpha course and explore whether Jesus really is the Son of God.

For if its true, then it can have amazing consequences for your life.

Yes, do make a response

Fill in the card with your name, address, and ideally e-mail address, and give it to me as you leave church.

“The story about him being born in Bethlehem is either true or a terrible lie. If it is true, then he wants your love”.