

Christmas Day – 2022

Isaiah 52: 7-10

Hebrews 1: 1-12

John 1:1-14

Love Came Down at Christmas

We have just sung this short Christmas carol, written by Christina Rossetti.

It succinctly expresses something of the nature of God and of Jesus. We celebrate the birth of Jesus today – I think you all knew that, didn't you?

We celebrate because this was the starting point of God being with us in human form, to show us through the life of Jesus how we should live, so that we can live in love and peace with each other and with God. God's love had been misunderstood, it had been thought of as something for a select group of people, rather than those select people being a beacon and a light, a model for how all of humankind was to live. God's love had been misunderstood because the love was corrupted; it included so much violence and condemnation of people who did not conform to the chosen people's rules and laws.

God had to find a way of correcting humankind's understanding of how we should live, and to show us what God's kingdom could be like if we all lived according to God's ways, the ways of love. In life we are called to love, called to want peace, the deepest form of inner peace for each other, and to want the best for each unique person who is made in the image of God. The prophets, who did their very best to open the hearts, minds, eyes and ears of the people to show how they were to live to be in and of the kingdom of

God, were seldom listened to and often these messengers were killed.

So, God came to us, in human form, “The Word became flesh and lived among us”, as our reading from John’s gospel reminds us.

Today we celebrate news of the birth of Jesus, and we can feel the joy and happiness we would feel for any news of the safe delivery of a baby into the world. These feelings are something we recall and experience every year, as we tell of the miraculous event of God taking on human form. God came down to earth, God was made flesh; love came down at Christmas and it was love divine.

Loving is holy work, but it can be hard. Hard to love those who are not likeable, who seem to have no redeeming features. And yet, Jesus’ example shows us that we can still respond with love, and that can be transformational for us and for the other person. The love we are asked to express is full of hope, full of healing, and full of care. Love without wondering if the person is ‘worth it’; for God’s love, God’s grace, God’s mercy endures for ever.

There is a simple Arabic carol – yes there are Arab Christians living in Palestine and other parts of the Arab world - called Laylat al-Miladⁱ, which translates as ‘On the night of Christmas’. Its words are very simple:

On the night of Christmas, hatred will vanish
On the night of Christmas, the earth blooms
On the night of Christmas, war is buried
On the night of Christmas, love is born.

The words are simple, but the sentiments, lived out through love, in the Holy Land, where occupation and oppression is a daily occurrence, are a challenge to express. Groups like Rabbis for Human Rights and the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine

and Israel (EAPPI) co-ordinated by the World Council of Churches live out a life of witness, in non-violent ways, ways of loveⁱⁱ.

I am not suggesting we can all commit to such challenging ways of showing and acting out God's love. I wonder what ways you have of showing and acting out God's love? I wonder what fresh ways you may wish to try this coming year? Things you have been minded to do for a while, or maybe something outside your comfort zone? Maybe picking olives in Palestine, or observing at a checkpoint in Jerusalem is what you yearn to do? But maybe not...

There are so many ways of showing Christian love, a sort of love that is transformational. Perhaps transformational for you, to see things differently, but most likely for someone who is affected by something as simple as your smile, your lightest of touches on someone's shoulder. We should never underestimate how a small gesture acts like a ripple of kindness throughout the world, just as a butterfly wing may cause a hurricane in a distant land, so a simple act of loving kindness can make a large ripple of love across our world.

Love came down at Christmas. Or as that Arabic carol said, 'On the night of Christmas, love is born.'

May you know God's love, on this day of new birth, of a new expression of God's love on earth. Let us give thanks for the birth of Jesus, Immanuel, God-with-us, and join in with all of creation's songs of praise and thanksgiving, that Love came down at Christmas. And may we all be open to Christ birthing afresh in us too.

I wish you all a peaceful and very happy Christmas, and last but not least, Happy Birthday Jesus.

ⁱ Laylat al-milad. A version can be listened to here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nn_uHQfSd2w

ⁱⁱ Rabbis for Human Rights www.rhr.org.il/eng EAPPI www.quakers.org.uk/our-work/eappi