

John 3:16-17 - Christmas Eve 2016

¹⁶ "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. (NLT)

Christmas Eve customs vary. One we heard about in a devotion this morning speaks of the door to the 'Christmas-room' being closed to the children of the house all day long. In the evening, they stand before the door, and the mother reads to them from Genesis 3 - of having eaten (not an apple) the forbidden fruit, and the results of this were being shut out of paradise, and the presence of God.

Then there is music from behind the door, welcoming them in. Once inside the room they sing: "Today he opens up the door to blessed paradise; the angel bars the way no more. To God our praises rise."

Today he opens up the door - John expresses that with this well-known verse which speaks of God's love for the world. God loves the world so much - that is not simply a case of being a nature-lover. God is a lover of mankind - of the people he had made. He continues to love them - to love us - in spite of the bad choices we made and continue to make. He continues to love us, even though we do not pay him the least attention.

It does not matter to God how long you have ignored his invitation to receive his love - what matters is that you hear it today, and that you accept his love for you, and that you go into the 'Christmas-room'.

How do you do that? First of all we have to understand that God's love is not simply an emotion - and it really is not a kind of (almost) fake hug when you greet someone. God's love is something he does for you, for me, for all people.

God loves the world - loves the people he made -, so much, that he reaches out to touch us by the birth of his Son. ... **he gave his one and only Son** John writes here. God handed his Son over to be a human baby - who would be subject to persecution not long after his birth.

God handed over his Son so that everyone who believes in Jesus will have real and lasting life. Some painters of the nativity scene put a cross in beams of the stable - because they had understood that this birth can only be understood in light of the cross of Good Friday, but also of the empty tomb on Easter morning.

Entering God's Christmas room - receiving his gift for me. It's about hearing the message - and understanding that it is for me. I said just now that God's love is not simply an emotion, but that does not mean that it lacks emotion. And when we respond to it, we are filled with a deep emotion of wonder and awe.

That was what happened to the shepherds - they literally went to the Christmas-room - and their lives were changed. The others in Bethlehem who heard their message that night experienced much the same: the sky glowed with God's love, as the angels called out the message of God's peace and favour to all people

It is this love which still glows today - because this message applies to you and me. The door to God's Christmas-room has been opened for us - the special message of this day is that we may come to him. He is waiting to welcome you with his gift. John says here that **God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.**

So let us celebrate this evening with the special message of God's love for us and for all people. Let us celebrate by opening ourselves - our heart and soul - to this message, and by receiving what God gives.

God loves you - no matter how you feel or what has been happening in your life. His love is something which speaks to each one of us, and reaches out to us - by what others do for us in his name. God loves you - and you can let others share in this love as you reach out to them in his name.

Let us respond to God's love for us as we confess our faith with the words of the Christmas Creed: