



## The wonder of the love of Christmas

For many people Christmas is a time about love, goodwill and generosity. We buy presents for those we love, and we look forward to receiving gifts from them. Have you ever wondered why it is that Christmas is the time of year when these feelings are most prominent? Perhaps it's our feeble attempt to imitate the love that God so wonderfully showed to the world at the first Christmas, when he sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be our Saviour.

God's love stands beyond comparison. It's in a class all its own, and to understand Christmas properly we need to understand God's love.

## Undeserved love

The New Testament describes the undeserved nature of God's love for us in these lovely words:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6-8).

God shows love to the ungodly. 'Ungodly' means 'unlike God'. We were made in the image of God, but sin has so disfigured this image that we're all naturally ungodly. We do not love God, nor do we know God. We are, the Bible says, enemies of God; alien and hostile, at war with God.

The greatest thing about human beings, as distinct from all other creatures, is not our brains, but that we were made to know and enjoy God. But sin has robbed us of that. We have no rights or claims. We're in a hopeless position, but *the message of Christmas is that God still loves us, and that Christ came into this world to die for ungodly men and women, who don't and can't deserve it.*

## Unsought love

The apostle John gives us this staggering description of divine love in the New Testament: 'This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.'

As ungodly people we don't love God, nor do we seek to be loved by God. Our natures and minds are so darkened by sin that we're ignorant of God's love and mercy. We take the blessings of life for granted—health, food, breath, and the beauty of creation—and we never acknowledge these as gifts from God. We talk instead about Mother Nature, while the Bible talks about the Creator God. We talk about the Laws of Nature, while the Bible talks about the will and providence of God. Because we exclude God, we don't seek him. But he seeks us.

*The message of Christmas is that Jesus came to seek and save the lost. It wasn't that we loved him, but that he loved us. And what love!*

Divine love is not an empty, sentimental pity, but it demonstrated itself in an act of sacrifice when Jesus died on a cross in the place of sinners.

On the cross, bearing our sin and guilt, Jesus endured the wrath of God in our place and on our behalf paid fully the

debt we owed to God for breaking his holy law. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. For thirty-three years he lived a sinless life, and then he died at Calvary in our place. He made it possible for God to pardon us even though we were sinners and had broken his law.

God dealt with the problem of sin in the only way that could satisfy his holy justice and enable him to move in and break the power of Satan in the lives of lost sinners. By punishing the only man who could possibly be our substitute, because of his sinlessness, God is now able to give to us the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is an amazing act of love.

## Unimaginable love

The apostle John delights in this love of God: 'How great is the love that the Father has lavished upon us!'

The word 'lavished' is an extravagant word; it depicts something overloaded and extreme. 'Lavished' speaks of abundance, and tells us that God's love is no small, carefully measured thing, but a love that is unimaginable in its beauty and scope. It is this love that enables God to give his Son for us. Who could ever imagine God doing such a thing for miserable, hell-deserving sinners?

*The love of God for us in Jesus is vast,*

*unmeasured, boundless and free. This is the love of Christmas. To miss this love means not only missing the true meaning of Christmas, but also missing the purpose of life; missing our only hope of salvation and the joy of knowing God.*

You'll miss this love and see no need for it if you don't take seriously your sin and God's anger against it. But once you see that you're an ungodly, powerless sinner, God's love in Christ becomes your only hope. Go to him and ask for forgiveness and salvation. Go in the confidence of all that God's love is, and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour.



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