



Dear Friends,

I find it fascinating that church attendance at Christmas continues to defy the trends of our times. Numbers for Christingle services including children have been up. Carol and nativity services have been attracting new people too. And this in spite of all the anti-God literature that pours off the popular press. None of this does not seem to deter people from coming to church at Christmas. We could ask the question why?

I am sure it is not because people's doubts or misgivings about faith suddenly evaporate for a few weeks in December. What I would say is that Christmas gives us a story worth listening to. Otherwise why all the pageants and nativity plays around this time? But what if this story is not just for children, that it reveals something about us which helps us to reconnect with life's deeper meanings?

The Christmas story has a bigger context than we may normally grant it. The biblical narrative reveals that it begins way back at the dawn of time when everything started out so well, but that something went terribly wrong with people ending up losing their way in life and getting themselves into a hopeless mess.



Does that narrative ring any bells in our lives, even on a daily basis? Do we not sometimes get ourselves in a terrible tangle, sometimes not of our own making? The biblical narrative goes on to say that into the den of human hopelessness steps the redeeming grace of God. But instead of this happening in some flashy, showy way, God steps in by way of a life, the life of a helpless and vulnerable baby. Such is God's way of salvation, not according to human ingenuity, for we always end up making a mess of things, but according to his grace.

Do we see our lives then in this story? More crucially, do we see our need of being saved by grace? The story of Christmas tells us that what matters to us also matters to God.

Christmas thus reminds us of God's love, that he is completely committed to us and to the world. Christmas is then a message of hope and yes of joy if we will embrace it. The babe in the manger is the Saviour of the world. And this perfect child, born in our hearts, will make our hearts good; that is God's gift to us.

Christmas also provides us with a space to reflect, to catch up on ourselves in the midst of the rush of our busy world. We all need that quiet

place, for it is often in the hush, and not in the noise, that we hear the 'still small voice' calling us, wooing us to Godself.

The amazing thing is God takes us just as we are, no strings attached. There are no entrance examinations to God's family. All we need to do is entrust our lives to Jesus and rest on his redeeming love. And that work includes his incarnation, his entrance into our world, as Wesley put it,

*Our God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made man.*

I can hear the atheist protest at this point – surely none of this is true? Well if God is a delusion, as some people would want us to believe, then quite a lot of what makes up human life must be a delusion too, including life's deeper values and human hopes for forgiveness and salvation.

What has the atheist to offer instead?

No, the Christmas story touches the deepest springs of human nature, for it not only works objectively, contained in the story's narrative, it also works subjectively, in our hearts where it matters most. And that is ultimately what Christmas is about, to quote Bob Dylan's album, '*Christmas in the heart*'.

Perhaps that is the reason why coming to church at Christmas remains popular, not because of its trappings, but because it means something; it brings us good news. And that is for life, not just for Christmas.

We can eat and drink and be merry for the love of God is the source of all joy and all good things, and this joy is present in the Babe of Bethlehem.

Every blessing for the Festive Season
and the New Year of 2025,

Rev John