



Last week using our theme, **SHARE THE LIGHT**, we looked at ways of bringing **HOPE** to those around us. This week we focus on the **LOVE** that came down at Christmas & we celebrate God making good on a promise He had made centuries earlier, that a child would be born who would be both God & man, the Messiah. When God makes promises He keeps them & so Jesus was born.

It was God's idea to come to earth & live as Jesus, fully man yet fully God. It was for our sake He did this, it was God's gift of LOVE to us. John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son..."* Because God lived as a man He could pay the penalty of death that He as God had imposed on man because of sin. Jesus talked of His love towards us & how we are to love each other. John 15:12-14 *"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are My*

friends if you do what I command". As Saviour Jesus did in love, lay down His life for us & His death on the cross opened the way for us to have a relationship of LOVE with God.

In our relationship with God we have confidence that He understands what we're feeling & experiencing as humans on earth, because He's been here & knows what it's like to be tired, sad, frustrated, etc. *It's helpful to remember that Jesus came in love looking to the interests of others, not clinging on to His rights & privileges as God. In every sense His love was sacrificial & takes us outside our own preferences. 1 Corinthians 13:5 "Love does not insist on its own way, it is not easily angered". In love we are called to put others first. Paul's love for the Corinthians sets a similar standard in 2 Corinthians 12:15 "I will gladly spend myself & all I have for you."*

Jeremiah recognized that when

everything else is stripped away, God's love remains. Lamentations 3:22-23 *"Because of the LORD's great LOVE we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. (NLT 'the faithful LOVE of the LORD never ends!')* They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." At the front of my spiritual diary & printed in my study are the words "LOVE WINS". God's love for us will outlast whatever personal circumstances we face.

Isaiah's words in 40:3-5, *"In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up & every mountain & hill made low; the uneven ground shall become level, & the rough places smooth."* The imagery is of an arduous journey, zigzagging from side to side, potholed & bumpy, up & down. I've been in a bus as it snaked slowly, labouring up the road into Bethlehem. It wasn't an easy journey. Two thousand years ago Mary, heavily pregnant, probably rode a donkey as Joseph walked, leading it from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This 7-10 day journey of 90 miles climbed 2500 feet on precarious, winding, rough terrain roads. This was how love came down to us at Christmas – **DANGEROUSLY!** A journey of obedience to Roman laws & a journey of faith in God.

It is in the middle of life's trials (our precarious, winding, rough terrain roads) that we are called to love God & to share God's love with others. In Wednesday's superb Mission Prayer Meeting with Howard & Janet we were moved & challenged to hear stories of believers in dangerous locations **"CRAZILY, BOLDLY WITNESSING"** about the love & goodness of God. The Holy Spirit is moving in power & many are turning to Jesus & growing in their faith. One couple have almost nothing practically, often go hungry whilst willingly sharing the little they do have & yet they continue to worship in their home at any opportunity spontaneously praising God & praying. They are materially poor but spiritually rich. This contrast struck me forcibly after a chat with a Portstewart friend during which he suggested that this pandemic has become a litmus test for people's spirituality. Many are rich materially, but spiritually may have head knowledge but not heart responsiveness. **I pray that as Christmas & COVID press into us on our precarious, winding, rough terrain road, that our lives reflect the fruit of the Spirit (LOVE, joy, peace, patience...Gal 5:19-23)**

*Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and angels gave the sign.*

*Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine;
Worship we our Jesus:
But wherewith for sacred sign?*

*Love shall be our token,
Love shall be yours & Love be mine,
Love to God and to all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.*

Christina Georgina Rossetti 1885

When Love came down to earth
And made His home with men,
The hopeless found a hope,
The sinner found a friend.
Not to the powerful
But to the poor He came,
And humble, hungry hearts
Were satisfied again.

What joy, what peace has come to us!
What hope, what help, what love!

When every unclean thought,
And every sinful deed
Was scourged upon His back
And hammered through His feet.
The Innocent is cursed,
The guilty are released;
The punishment of God
On God has brought me peace.

Come lay your heavy load
Down at the Master's feet;
Your shame will be removed,
Your joy will be complete.
Come crucify your pride,
And enter as a child;
For those who bow down low
He'll lift up to His side.

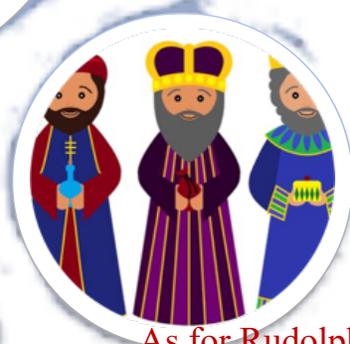
Stuart Townend, 2001



Christmas Restrictions 2020

There's no Nativity this year because the 3 Wise Men face a travel ban.

The shepherds have been furloughed.



The Inn Keeper has shut under Tier 3 regulations and had a slump in bookings.

Santa won't be working as he would break the rule of 6 with Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Donner and Blitzen

As for Rudolph, with that red nose he should be isolating and taking a test.



Someone sent me this during the week from silversurfers.com