

## Christmas Day 2020

Well, we made it! We have sent cards and wrapped presents and decorated and shopped and cooked – and we've made it to Christmas Day. Possibly a bit tired – but I hope happy. Though most of us are also probably a bit worried, or sad about family and friends we can't spend Christmas with. And most of us are looking back at a difficult year, and some of us have lost people we loved.

So, many of us greet Christmas morning, this year, with slightly mixed feelings. But however we feel, and whatever else is going on – we are here. And we have many reasons for being here: faith; hope; tradition; community. Christmas carols! But one reason I am certain we all share: the feeling that we are welcome here, in this house of God.

We welcome each other, and framing and empowering our welcome, is a much bigger one. Which says to every one of us, however you are feeling, and whatever is going on in your life, you are at home here. Here you are known, inside and out, and loved, and treasured. By your neighbours, and, above all, by God and Jesus Christ.

Because one way to describe what we celebrate today is to say that God so loved the world that he sent his Son to make it home. To make this world, which for Adam and Eve and their descendents was a place of exile, of hard graft and a steep learning curve, into the place where God and humanity are reunited: where, as the Book of Revelation says, God makes his home with his people, and we are at home with God. It's pure gift.

And it's the irony of the season, that we prepare for it for weeks, and when it comes, we're so busy giving and receiving our own presents we're rarely completely ready to receive God's. But, as it happens, I don't think that matters too much. For one thing, all the gifts we give and receive are Christmas are practice – practice in love, and practice in grace – *charis* – that beautiful word in Greek which means both generosity and gratitude. We are all practising grace on one another!

And, anyway, I'm not sure we could ever be completely ready for a gift from God. Any more than new parents like Mary and Joseph can be completely ready for their first child. Love, and grace, and bringing up a baby, are three things we grow into as we practise them.

And we can and do practise them, and hope to get better at them, not least because the grace of God in Christ is the one present we get every year that we don't open. This is the present that opens us.

Because the Word of God, as John calls him, who comes into the world, full of grace and truth, is the Jesus who will grow up to say, Don't be afraid.

Come to me, when you are tired and burdened, with all the damage you've received, and the damage you've done, and put it all down here.

Come to me, and let yourself be known, inside and out, and treasured, and loved.

And in the warmth of that love, let your heart open like a flower, and feel yourself growing and flourishing.

Because, as John's gospel says, Jesus Christ came that you should have life, and have it more abundantly – life in you, and working with you, until your heart and mind and arms are as wide open as God's and Christ's own, and wherever you are in your own life, you know you are also, always, at home in the house of God.

A very happy Christmas to you.

Amen