

SUNDAY, December 22 2024 Love Came Down at Christmas

Micah 5:2-5 Luke 2:1-14

Throughout Advent we have been singing “Love Came Down at Christmas” as our opening hymn of praise as a way of preparing ourselves for the birth of Jesus. First published as a poem without a title in *Time Flies: A Reading Diary* in 1885. Written by Christina Rossetti, this poem was later included in the collection *Verses* in 1893 under the title "Christmastide". In 2007 the Christian Rock Group, “Jars of Clay” covered this Christmas hymn on their Christmas Song album and this album is still selling with great reviews. What is it about Rossetti’s words that seem to still speak to us so many years later? We are reminded of the gift that God gave to the Ones he created and loved. This gift is Jesus and in the midst of the preparing for the big celebration at your home or another’s, what is it that seems to be floating about? Is there something that may not be articulated in words but may be intangible yet clearly experienced? What do you call this and would you say it is a Gift from God?

In the busyness of Christmas gatherings for meals, activities or just being, the purpose of the gathering has lost its meaning. The office Christmas gathering has given way to sharing experiences together and yes there will be food, but it is the activity that is shared that enables people to learn about the others. Is Christmas mentioned? Rarely but what is often discussed is travel plans, and the gifts going to be or having been purchased. Only as an aside the real meaning of Christmas, that is Jesus’ birth is ever mentioned and if people actually say they will be attending a worship service they might even be asked why? What is the significance of Christmas worship and the holidays? This is concerning as the next generations or people new to Canada may not know the connections between Jesus’ birth and Santa Claus; or angels songs with stars on Christmas trees. The symbols and colours of Christmas are not taught, understood or even known.

Yet the words written by Rossetti share in simple words the message of the stars and angels as signs of who was born-- God’s Son, One of the Trinity- Godhead. The incarnation is the Christian doctrine that God became flesh, meaning that God assumed a human nature by being born of a woman as an infant. This infant, child grew to become a man in the form of Jesus Christ. This baby is the Son of God and the second person of the Trinity. Christ was truly God and truly man. And why? Why did God become human in the form of Jesus?

So that Jesus could save us from sin as he knew no sin. He is of God and human. It is only through Jesus that we may be given the hope of eternal life. Jesus needed to be born as human in

order for us to relate to him, learn by his example and to follow his teachings. Jesus knew living life as a poor carpenter's son in that age of oppression was not easy. Nor is it easy for everyone who has turned to Christ's teachings and follows.

But not everyone will receive this Gift from God as described by Rosetti because God's gift of love has not been fully shared. Prophecies of hundreds of years before Jesus' birth were not or are not fully known. Yet in these last weeks we have listened to the words of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Micah which tell those reading them of the promised Messiah of God. That He would be of the line of David; and even our reading from Micah tells us where this ruler will be born. And it is this ruler who will lead the people of Israel and be saved. Micah 5 says that Bethlehem in Judah will be the birthplace of the Ruler of Israel. And this ruler 'shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord and in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.' The people shall live secure for he shall be great not only in Judah, but to the ends of the earth." IT is also this prophecy that the Wise Men of the East read and knew to which city to travel in order to worship the Infant Child.

But somehow this message of God's gift to us has been losing ground when we see stores and restaurants clamoring for business, and for each person to get the best gift for their loved ones. But just what is being purchased? Clothes, traditional socks and underwear but also electronics of many kinds. But where is the love?

Many people who do not know the Gift of Christmas is the gift from God of the Baby born in a stable and who slept in a manger. This Gift of the infant Jesus is the gift that calls us to hear the good news of hope in a time when we really need it. And we need this hope at this time as we enter into the year which defines the first quarter of this century. 2025 we know will bring even more challenges. The UN has named five key areas: 1 Peace And Security: Resolving Catastrophic Conflict. This includes negotiations to resolve the world's conflicts and wars in Gaza, Sudan, and Ukraine as well as recent developments in Syria. 2. Financing for Development: Investing in a Sustainable Future Even though nearly half the global population is under 30, just 6% of development aid reaches young people and children. The need to invest in youth and children is the means to unlock the future's full potential. 3. Climate Action: The Road to COP 30 and IMO Negotiations. All eyes will be on COP 30 in Belem, Brazil, next fall, by which time countries will have announced a new round of greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs). 4. Gender Equality: Reflecting on Progress Amid Rollbacks. As 2025 begins, the outlook for gender equality remains bleak. Hard-won gains, including the right to education, health care, and freedom of movement, are being challenged across the globe. With the Taliban's 2024 ban on girls and women from speaking in public in

Afghanistan is among the most egregious. At the same time, 2025 is a commemorative year for the global gender equality movement, marking the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the 1995 adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+30). And 5. The UN at 80: Reforming an Institution Born Amid World War II. The UN will mark its 80th year, and enacting urgent reforms to upgrade some of its World War II era bodies and processes will continue to be a major priority. "The world has changed drastically since 1945, and the UN must adapt to remain fit for purpose.

These are the concerns of the UN on our global experience. But there are many concerns facing our country and its people- there are many living not in warm caring places like this but on the street or through the shelter system which now limits how many and who may stay and for how long. There is only so much money and food set aside to help the people who need it right away. Yet can one say that when a person supports these agencies they are spreading the love.

Yes love is shared, but it is only temporary? When God gave the Gift of Jesus it was not a quick thought by God nor was it seen as a short-term gift. It is a gift for all people throughout history and the future. Here we are over 2000 years later and still welcoming Jesus amongst us as the gift of love from God the father! We too look to 2025 as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of The United Church of Canada born between the World Wars out of need to work together in a growing country and across denominational lines and differences. But are we truly influencing Canadian culture with the message of Jesus' love at this time in our history?

God's gift to us is Jesus and we remember his birth at this time of wonder and joy. When someone gives you a gift how do you respond? By saying thank you. But how do you say thank you to God? Rosetti states: Love be yours and love be mine. Love to God and all men (people). This gift of Love is for all people. How do you acknowledge this Gift of love as you pray and honour Jesus at this time?

God gave to us Jesus to become like us human. Jesus experienced life as an individual living in a family and all its joys and sorrows. He knew what living life at a time of oppression was like; he was poor and yet worked as a carpenter with his dad. He lived faithfully and learned more about God as a Jewish man. And he was the one 'sent to proclaim the Good news and set his people free.'" This is the Gift God gave in and through love. This is what we celebrate as we welcome Jesus into our midst and remember his birth. But what we also must remember what he did through his life, death and resurrection. For it is in Christ alone that we are offered another gift- life eternal. This is the reason we celebrate his coming to us.

Let us rejoice and remember as we pray:

God of love and grace we praise you for your Gift to us in Jesus, born in a stable, out of love for us all. Enable us to understand the depth of your love for us through this gift of Jesus. Because it is through him that we can rejoice and be glad that we may receive the gifts of peace, hope, joy and love through the coming of Jesus into our human existence. Help us to understand. Enable us to open our minds and our hearts to know you and love you. Thank you God for this gift of love in Jesus and the gift of love we experience with others because of Jesus' birth. Bless us we pray as we remember that Love came down at Christmas so that we might fully love others in your name. Hear our prayers O God. SILENCE. Amen.

<https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/5-global-issues-to-watch-in-2025/>