

Luke 2:8-20/Titus 3:4-7

(CW Christmas Day Communion)

On Christmas morning we celebrate with joy and thanksgiving the birth of Jesus Christ.

We are here to echo the song the angels sang when Jesus was born:

*‘Glory to God in the Highest and peace to those on whom his favour rests.’*

But what is it that you want for Christmas? I mean, really want?

Even though most of us are long past the age of writing lists, we may well have had secret hopes for a particular gift.

Our deepest Christmas desires and hopes might be summarised in the following way:-

Firstly we have a desire for gifts and presents. Not because we desperately need (usually) the thing that is given, but because we crave signals of love and regard from those who give them to us.

It is a fundamental human desire to be noticed, appreciated, and cherished.

*(cherish, which is an essential Christian quality – valued for who we are)*

Secondly we have a desire for those whom we love. Separation is hard at Christmas- especially separation through bereavement. We want a loving presence, not simply a symbolic gift.

Finally there is a Christmas desire that goes beyond our personal needs. There is deep hunger for peace. Yes, a peace that begins in our own homes – and we know that can be difficult at Christmas- but a peace that also reaches out into our villages & communities, a peace that inhabits the whole world.

*At this current time we earnestly hope for a deeper peace in our nation and the world over.*

On this Christmas morning, we bring our desires and our hopes before God.

We began by praying to God, *‘to whom all hearts are open, all desires known.’*

And, as if in response, the first reading we heard from Paul’s letter to Titus contains the good news (and how we crave for good news) we have been waiting for:-

*‘But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour (that is Jesus) appeared, he saved us.’*

In Jesus, God has fulfilled our desire for gifts in an overwhelming way.

He has given us the most precious gift we could ask for. God so loved the world that he sent his Son.

The gift of Jesus is what we celebrate at Christmas, and it is the clearest possible sign that God values each one of us, - that the whole world, and all who are in it are objects of his love.

In Jesus, God has fulfilled our desire for a loving presence.

He has given us the most powerful presence we could ask for. Through Jesus coming into our world, God is intimately involved in human life and a permanent presence.

In Jesus, God has fulfilled our deepest desire for peace.

As St. Luke tells us, the angels sang to the shepherds, *‘Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to those with whom God’s favour rests.’*

A tremendous vision of encouragement, but not the whole story.

If we had read through the whole of Paul’s letter to Titus, we would have discovered that Paul seemed most concerned with how we behave in our daily lives.

How we act towards our husband, wife, employer, parents, children and neighbours.

It is, of course, very tempting to concentrate on the wonder, the beauty and the gift of Christmas, keeping the harsh realities of the world and of our lives at bay.

But that would be a travesty of the Christmas message.

Jesus (God in person) came into our world in very humble, harsh, indeed scandalous, circumstances.

Not for us to be able to escape the world and all that it brings, but rather so that our Christian faith could be lived out in the world as it really is.

And it is no good celebrating God's gift to us in Jesus, if we don't then become more Christ-like in our lives, if we do not grow into a people of generosity and hospitality and compassion.

It is no good celebrating God's presence with his people, if we do become a faithful and supportive presence to those we have been given to love (*not just those we like*) – all those around us, who have need.

And it is certainly no good joining in the angelic song of glory and peace if we do not allow our lives to become witnesses for peace in a troubled, divided and violent world.

In the words of St. Paul – '*Jesus Christ gave himself for us, to redeem us from all wickedness, and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*'

What does God really want for Christmas?

His desire is for us to receive and celebrate his gifts, and to become a people of his own, who are eager to bring the love, grace and peace of Jesus Christ to everyone around us.