

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son onto the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3: 16-17, 19)

The Gospel of John is the most theological of the four canonical gospels, adding an extra layer to the story told by John's predecessors Matthew, Mark and Luke. These words from the prologue of his gospel gives us an idea of how the earliest church was evolving from the same community as described in Mark and in the Acts of the Apostles. From a small community of followers, of men, women and children who had known and loved Jesus, the fellowship to which John wrote was much larger and more spread out into *the* empire where they would have had more contact with paganism and the wide variety of religious and philosophical "schools" that existed in every city and village. John opted to use the Jesus story to begin to develop a theological way of speaking of the Lord which was both a good and a not so good thing. It was good in that his thinking offered an alternative to all the other "isms" out there; it was not so hot because Christianity began to feel less like a movement of ordinary folk to a debating society of the "learned".

As we near the place of Jesus' incarnation and birth, we often lose the simplicity of it all – we say, "It can't be THAT simple – that God came in the form of a newborn baby to transform the old creation and bring in a new world of love, joy, hope and peace." And yet it IS that simple, IF we want it to be. Simplicity does not mean shallowness; simplicity means getting to the core of a story and rooting around to find the smallest seed of truth – and here it is in this morning's Scripture from John: God did love the world so much that He came and lived among us, sharing our humanity, knowing how it felt to weep with joy and to weep with sorrow, to love and be loved, to experience the hugs of friends and the whips of enemies. This is the Godstory in a nutshell and it is this that we are called, like shepherds and farmers, to embrace and celebrate.

Alternate Readings: Luke 2: 1-20

*Loving and giving God, we thank you for the blessings you have showered over all the world from that rude shelter in such a small and unimportant village like Bethlehem. How much like you it was – no great rolls of thunder and voices screaming, "Obey, obey", but the simple brush of angels' wings as they whispered, "Unto us a child is born, to us a son is given. Alleluia" Help us to keep the simple Christmas in our families, our communities and in our lives and in our hearts always. Amen*