



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

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The Feast of the Nativity *Christmas Eve, Sunday, December 24th 2017*

✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠

One of the most puzzling things about God is what made him think that creating human beings was such a good idea in the first place? It can't have been because he needs us to run the earth. The thing runs pretty well without our assistance. Indeed, truth to tell, it tends to run itself rather better without our help than with it. So why did God create us?

It couldn't have been because he wanted well-behaved domestic staff. If he'd wanted domestic staff he wouldn't have given us free will. After all, when he endowed us with free will he also endowed us with the capacity to disagree with him and reject him. And nobody wants help that answers back, rebels and goes on strike. So why did he create us?

It couldn't have been for our company and conversation. What could we, with our tiny, finite minds and miserable puny bodies, possibly say and do that would hold the attention and interest of God's infinite, eternal, ineffable intellect? He knows the thoughts passing through our minds even before we've formed them. So why did he create us?

It couldn't be for our innate, natural goodness and commonsense because we have certainly never shown any particular talent in either of those directions. Quite the contrary, in fact: Even when we act with the best of motives, the

results are all too frequently quite the reverse of those intended. Indeed, one might be forgiven for thinking that the higher our intentions, the more appalling the results.

If you find that hard to believe, just look at our recent history. Not one of the great monsters of our times set out to become a monster. Not Adolf Hitler. Not Josef Stalin. Not Chairman Mao. Not Pol Pot. Not Saddam Hussein. Not any terrorist or suicide bomber.

Every one of them believed they were inspired by the noblest and purest of motives. In fact every single one of them firmly believed they were acting for the greater good of mankind. It seems turning into monsters just comes naturally to us. Then why did God create us?

It couldn't be because he craved our love and respect. We have never given him that – not even from the earliest times. The Bible says Adam and Eve talked to him face to face on a daily basis. But they didn't take him all that seriously – certainly not seriously enough to consider obeying him unquestioningly. So why did he create us?

And it really doesn't matter whether or not you believe in Adam and Eve: History graphically demonstrates we have never shown any great inclination to take undue notice of him – even when it has manifestly been for our own good.

Take, for example, the Ten Commandments, . . . Only four of them deal with his relationship with us: And one of those gives us a day off work in exchange for an hour or so in church. The remaining six of them deal with our relationships with each other.

None of them are particularly onerous or demanding. What's more, the fact of the matter is that our lives would be infinitely more pleasant, tranquil and satisfying if only we'd try to follow them.

After all, it shouldn't be too difficult to honor the beliefs and customs of the people who founded this great society call the United States of America. That's the meaning of the commandment "honor thy father and thy mother." And it really shouldn't that much restraint to avoid committing murder, or adultery – no matter what Hollywood has to say on the subject of sex.

Nor should it be too hard to avoid stealing, or telling nasty lies about other people. Admittedly, giving up covetousness might be a tad more difficult in an acquisitive, consumer society like ours. However just think of the savings that would accrue if we'd only try.

But even though observing the 10 commandments is in very our best interests, and should clearly be a piece of cake, we break most of them – habitually and on a daily basis. So why did God create us?

The best explanation is that he made us because he is love – not that he loves, but that he actually IS love – and he made us to love us and to give us the pleasure of loving him. This probably seems a rather strange idea to the human mind. But then it would, then, wouldn't it?

The truth of the matter is that we find it very difficult to love any people other than our nearest and dearest. And, if we are honest, we must admit that it's hard to love even them quite as much as we love ourselves. And even this miserable standard falls very far short of loving the folks next door just as much as we love

ourselves – which is God's minimum criterion for loving.

So how can we be certain God loves us? The answer is found in the Christmas Gospel. It shows that not only did he send his only begotten Son to us; he sent him not as a mighty warrior on a white horse with a razor sharp sword to keep us in line, but as that most vulnerable of creature of all: a human baby.

Imagine, voluntarily handing over one's only child to the tender love and care of a bunch of homicidal thugs. It's hard for us to grasp the enormity of it. How many of us would be foolhardy enough to do any such thing for a horde of whining ingrates who only bother to keep in touch when they are in trouble.

But despite all that, God loves us so much that when we had dug ourselves a hole so deep there was absolutely no way of digging dig ourselves out of it, he sent his Son not simply to pull us out of the mire, but to suffer in our place the full criminal penalty for the crimes we have committed.

When all's said and done, Christmas confronts us with the greatest – and most mysterious – of all God's miracles. It is not the creation of heaven and earth and all that therein is. It isn't the parting of the Red Sea, or the Raising of Lazarus, or the Virgin Birth or even Jesus' mighty Resurrection.

God's greatest miracle, and greatest mystery, is best summed up by St. John: "So God loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

And that is something really worth celebrating, isn't it? *AMEN*