

The Miracles of Christmas: The Manger

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Date: 20 December 2020

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] Well, good morning and welcome to our online service for Sunday, December 20th, 2020. We're almost there. We're almost done 2020 already. It feels like it barely started in some ways, and yet in other ways it feels like it will probably never end.

But we are in the home stretch, so there you go. Almost there. My name is Kent Dixon, and I'm the lead pastor of Braymar Baptist Church here in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

So one brief announcement, if you're directly connected with our congregation, we are looking for volunteers to keep our sidewalks and part of our parking lot clear this winter.

So if you have a snowblower, or even if you don't, please contact Kathy Olson or Vern Castle as they are organizing that. And you will have their contact information in our church directory.

Also, we'd love to invite you to join us for our Christmas Eve candlelight service, and that will be live on Facebook. And believe it or not, that's already this coming Thursday evening at 6.30 p.m.

[1 : 07] 6.30 p.m. So if you're able to tune in live, that's 6.30 p.m. Mountain Time. Or you can tune in later on in the evening. Or even tune in and watch it on Christmas Day or later in the week.

Well, it's hard to believe that there's now less than a week until Christmas, isn't it? It's pretty hard to believe. And I can't imagine that any of us would have guessed even a tiny amount at all that 2020 would have in store for us when that calendar turned over in January.

But for all the anxiety and uncertainty that this year has brought with it, we still have the hope and joy of the Christmas season all around us, don't we?

And amen for that. I don't know about you, but I certainly need it. I mourn for those whose lives have been affected by the pandemic, those whose health has been affected, those who have been isolated and felt alone and lonely and missed their loved ones, those who have lost loved ones due to the pandemic, either directly due to COVID-19 or to the associated health concerns that put them at risk in other ways.

For folks that have lost jobs and lost income, I mourn for them as well. And I pray that God will provide. God will step in. Because God, as we can all agree, shows up in the most unexpected ways and at the most unexpected times.

[2 : 41] So that's my prayer for folks who are finding it to be a hard time right now. Cherished traditions and gatherings have largely been put on hold for all of us this year.

For our family, for the first time in many, many years, over two decades, we've had to put a pause on a traditional family trip that we made to visit extended family and spend time with them.

It's just not wise for us this year. And so we've come to that realization and we're adjusting our plans. We attended a family wedding this past weekend that I also had the honor of officiating.

So that was pretty special. And it looked very different from how the majority of us would expect a wedding to look or would be familiar with a wedding looking. There were very few guests.

The majority of folks tuned in to a live stream broadcast like this to watch the ceremony from far and wide. Everyone who attended in person was physically distanced and wearing masks.

[3 : 48] But we still celebrated. We still recognized an important step in the lives of a special couple. And despite the pandemic, folks, my prayer for each of you is that you'll still be able to reflect on the things that you can do.

The people whose company you can enjoy this season. Whether that's in person, in a safe way, in your home or online. If you're able to connect with them through Zoom or Facebook Messenger or any of those other great technological tools that we have.

Even just a phone call is still great. Or a text message. And despite so many things being different this year, we still celebrate.

We still recognize the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, at this time of year. And even more than that, we recognize that God is still in control.

He's in control of our lives. And he's in control of our circumstances, despite how it may seem. Let's open in prayer. Jesus, your name is beautiful and special.

[4 : 57] You are the Lord of salvation. Our God who saves. I'm so grateful that you entered this hostile world to save me. To save every one of us.

You are so much more than a teacher, a healer, a counselor, and a prophet. You are a savior. And that is good news. May the wonder of your name fill our hearts with joy this Christmas and always. In your precious name we pray. Amen. Well, now let's join together in worship this morning as we're singing four carols.

So we'll be singing Away in a Manger, O Holy Night, O Little Town of Bethlehem, and Joy to the World. I know he sang Joy to the World. I believe it was last week, but I just can't resist.

It's one of my favorites. So as always, you'll be able to follow along on the screen with lyrics and the worship leader. So let's sing our praises to our awesome God this morning with these beautiful songs of the season.

[6 : 04] God bless you as you sing. Away in a Manger, No crib for a guy The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet heaven The stars in the sky looking down where he lay The little Lord Jesus asleep in the lake The cattle are low when the baby awakes The little Lord Jesus no cry he makes I love thee, Lord Jesus I love thee, Lord Jesus Stay by my cradle till morning, draw night

Be near me, Lord Jesus I ask thee to stay Go by me forever and love me, I pray Bless all the dear children in thy tender care And take us to heaven and live with us there Holy night The stars are brightly shining O holy night The stars are brightly shining It is the night Of our dear Savior's world Long lay the world In sin and error pining Till he appeared And the soul felt its worth The thrill of hope The weary world rejoices For yons of grace The new and glorious morn Fall on your knees Oh hear the angel voices

O night divine O night When Christ was born O night divine O night O night divine O night divine O night Ant ¿Virra?

O night divine Oh dear O nightourt Oorn No O night divine O nightración O night■■ O night■ O night divine O nightline O night to day O night sync■■ theridge O night43 O night How still we see thee lie Above thy deep and dreamless sleep The silent stars go by Yet in thy dark streets shineth The everlasting light The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee tonight For Christ is born of Mary

[11 : 16] And gathered all above While mortals sleep the angels keep They'll watch a wandering low O morning stars together Proclaim the holy birth And praises sing to God the King And peace to man on earth How silently, how silently The wondrous gift is given So God imparts to human hearts

The blessings of his hand No, you may hear his coming But in this world of sin Where meek souls will receive him Still, the dear Christ enters in O holy child of Bethlehem To sin on us, we pray Cast out our sin and enter in Be born in us today We hear the Christmas angels

The great glad tidings tell The great glad tidings tell O come to us Abide in us Abide in us O Lord Emmanuel Chest kiss May the breath O Lord Emmanuel Our05 The hay & dear Somewhere in our A ■■■■ glorious Arbiton Joy to the world, the Lord is come Let earth receive her King Let every heart prepare Him room

In heaven and nature sing In heaven and nature sing In heaven, heaven and nature sing Joy to the world, the Savior reigns Let men their songs employ Wild fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains Repeat the sounding joy Repeat the sounding joy Repeat, repeat the sounding joy He rules the world with truth and grace And makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness And wonders of His love And wonders of His love And wonders, wonders of His love It's so wonderful to sing Christmas carols, isn't it?

[16 : 09] Even in this way to know that As we're tuning in, as we're watching, we're singing at the same time as others Even though we can't hear them And yet our hearts are singing these words as well Our hearts and our souls are just resounding with the truth of this message That a baby was born in Bethlehem and He is Christ the Lord Well, on each Sunday of the Advent season We will recognize one of the four virtues Or we have recognized one of the four virtues that Jesus brings us Hope, love, joy and peace And this morning as we continue in As we kind of wrap up this part of the season of Advent We're lighting our first, second and third candles again Which represent hope Hope, love, and joy And we'll also light our fourth candle

Which represents peace If I can get this to work There we go The fourth candle The candle of peace Today, like Mary, we wait for the Christ child We celebrate all that God has already done And say in the words of Luke 1, 46 and 47 My soul glorifies the Lord And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior We reflect on the wonder of the precious name of Jesus Our Savior and Prince of Peace Today, my friends, focus on the peace that comes from knowing That God is still in control And that Jesus is the God who saves Amen Well, over the course of our Advent sermon series this year We've reflected on some of the scenes from the beloved Christmas movie Miracle on 34th Street And we've done that to help us gain some perspective During our sermon series The Miracles of Christmas Over the course of this series Which concludes now, by the way I've talked a bit about several scenes from the film But I haven't really given you a sense of the main focus of the story Well, as you may remember The movie is largely focused on a man named Chris Kringle And the fact that he may, in fact, be Santa Claus Certainly, Kringle believes that himself And at the beginning of the film There's this wonderful scene Chris Kringle is walking down a busy city street And stops to wait for a crosswalk He's waiting for the light to change And as he stands there There's a young boy standing with his grandfather nearby And the young boy looks up at Kringle And a wide-eyed moment happens The boy begins to recognize Who he believes this man to be And this young boy enthusiastically begins to try And convince his grandfather That the man standing next to them is Santa Claus While embarrassed The grandfather apologizes And explains reluctantly He thinks you're Santa Claus So there's an awkward moment The two men laugh Presumably over the silliness of the boy's assertions Kringle winks Leans in closer and whispers I am The rest of the film Essentially unfolds with evidence To either refute Or support Kringle's claim I think we'd all agree That we seem to live In a largely skeptical society Don't we?

Each of us also likely know people Who tend to exaggerate Or tend to make false claims Or perhaps we've even in the past Believed something to be true ourselves Only to discover later that it's false We've talked about in the past That truth or falsehood Can simply be a matter of perspective From a certain point of view So maybe we've come by our sense of skepticism As a society honestly Despite our tendency towards skepticism in our lives I believe there's something about the story Of Miracle on 34th Street That catches our attention As the story unfolds We recognize this childlike hope That perhaps Kris Kringle Really is Santa Claus Well it begins to open up some incredible And amazing opportunities Doesn't it?

[21 : 05] Could he be? What if he is? And if he is who he says he is How sad that some folks don't seem to recognize him How tragic for him to be thought to be a fraud Or of somehow questionable mental state People think he might be crazy Well can you recognize that some of the same questions Can be or even have been Asked about the miracle of Christmas The ultimate miracle of Christmas Who is this baby lying in the manger?

Could he really be who everyone says he is? And what if he is? Well let's listen to the words of the Gospel of John John chapter 1 verses 1 to 5 John says One translation says Other translations of the Bible say The darkness has not overcome it And that may be more familiar to you And continuing in John 1 verses 9 to 14 The true light that gives light to every man Was coming into the world He was in the world And through the world Though the world was made through him The world did not recognize him He came to that which was his own But his own did not receive him Yet to all who received him To those who believed in his name He gave the right to become children of God Children born not of natural descent Nor of human decision Or a husband's will But born of God The word became flesh And made his dwelling among us We have seen his glory The glory of the one and only Who came from the Father Full of grace and truth The big question to be answered in the movie Miracle on 34th Street Is also the big question we consider When we consider the birth and life of Jesus Christ

It's a question of identity Who exactly is the child we find In the manger in Bethlehem? Well, I think we'd all agree There are some fairly astonishing claims That are made about The coming of this baby The coming of this king Could he be who he claims to be?

Well, an old gentleman with a white beard And a friendly smile Claims to be Not a Santa But the Santa Kris Kringle St. Nicholas The one and only Santa Claus And I believe that we can't help but smile As we consider that possibility, right?

[24 : 33] There's something in us Some childlike part of us That recognizes the magic of the mystery of that And perhaps there's something that compels us To even want to believe But of

course We know better, right?

Or do we? Well, we've talked about how Santa manages To get toys to children And hopefully adults too, right? Around the world And in such a short time frame Well We also recognize We recognize that in past sermons But Santa can't possibly have flying reindeer, right? Reindeer can't fly Or a workforce of elves Or live in a magical workshop at the North Pole Can he? Well, consider for a moment This miracle of the manger Consider the astonishing claims Made about the child whose mother Wrapped him in blankets And laid him there Jesus was born into the most humble circumstances imaginable And as we've considered His mother was an ordinary young girl Named Mary He was born in a stable A barn Or a cave In a small, obscure little town Called Bethlehem We sang about Bethlehem This morning Or just a bit ago Depending on when you're watching But we recognize That some of these astonishing claims Were made about the arrival And impact Jesus would have And that all of those claims Centered around his identity The prophecies about Jesus

And later his claims about himself Were clear that he was sent from God That he was and is the Son of God And even one with God As an equal member of the Trinity In Luke 2 verse 1 We learn that the angel announced to shepherds That this baby was Christ the Lord As an adult Jesus himself claimed That he was the bread of life That he was living water That he was the only one The only thing The only person That could truly satisfy Our deepest hunger and thirst Jesus personally claimed To have authority To forgive our sins He freely offered his grace And mercy To make that possible Jesus bridged the gap Jesus personally claimed To be the way The truth And the life The resurrection The only hope Of escaping God's judgment The only path To eternal life Jesus personally claimed That all authority In heaven and on earth Was his He also promised He would return one day To judge the world In righteousness Well what do you make Of these pretty radical claims?

[27 : 42] Many people are not impacted By them at all Or others write them off As ridiculous And just outright reject them Or simply ignore them altogether It's not important to me It's not relevant to me I'm It doesn't matter to me Either way Well there are even some Who may recognize And respect Jesus To some extent But they still don't take His astonishing claims Seriously They may think of him As a good man A good teacher But that's where it ends The religion of Islam Teaches that Jesus Was a prophet And a teacher That's essentially it The Hindu religion Teaches that Jesus Is one way Of many To find God Many people are fine With admiring Jesus From a distance But when it comes Right down to it They may simply See him as

A nice man With a beard C.S. Lewis Explained that Jesus did not Leave us the option Of simply respecting him As a good Noble Teacher He didn't give us That option Even though this May be a popular Perspective Jesus' own claims About himself Do not make that Conclusion A realistic one It wasn't one Of the choices Either Jesus Was and is All he claims To be There's three Options really Sorry I'll back up There's three options As we consider His claims And maybe you've Even considered These yourself Over time First Either Jesus Was and is All he claimed To be Or second He made these Claims Knowing they Were false Knowing full Well they Were false Which makes Him essentially A liar

Someone who Is deceptive Sought to deceive As many people As possible For his own Purposes Or third He made these Claims Because he Believed He personally Believed them To be true But in reality They were not Which makes him Either deluded Or possibly Someone who Had a serious Mental illness Well when it Comes to these Astonishing claims Made by Jesus These are really Only the three Conclusions We can come to And as I learned In seminary I almost said Cemetery At times It felt like It would kill Us But in seminary As we studied The claims Of Jesus We learned He is Lord He is A liar Or he is A lunatic Those are the Three options We simply Cannot stay On the fence Jesus cannot Simply be Just a nice Man with a Beard So folks

What if Jesus is Who he Claims To be Do you Believe Jesus Claims Do you Believe The claims Made about This child Born in Bethlehem Claims Made by Both others And even Himself Claims Made Thousands Of years Before he Came Do you Believe These claims Are True Well let's Consider for A moment What are The incredible Implications Of believing The claims Of Jesus What if There is Someone Who knows Your name Who knows When you're Sleeping And knows When you're Awake What if That someone Does know When you've Been bad Or good And yet Even With that Miraculous And comforting Knowledge He still Loves you

And longs For you To know Love And worship Him What if This child Born in Bethlehem Really Is The miracle Of the Manger What if Jesus Really Was And is Exactly Who he Claims To be If he Is My friends Then you And I Have a Decision To make And that Decision Has eternal Significance For each One of us What we Decide About this Child born In Bethlehem This miracle Of the Manger Not only Determines Our eternal Destiny But it Must also Determine Our earthly Actions And directions As well We can't Simply Accept the Claims And truth Of Jesus Without Recognizing That he Staked his

[32 : 46] Claim On our Lives If Jesus Is who He says He is The awesome Reality Is that Means that Also All of The promises He made To And for Us Are True He really Can And will Wipe away The pain Of your Past He can He can Comfort You In the Unknown Of your Present Circumstances And he Can take Away the Burden Of guilt And regret That we May carry Over the Sin and Sinful Choices Of our Lives Friends Jesus Jesus Gives Us A new Purpose He gives Us a New Focus For our Lives And he Fills Us With the Fullness Of his Love His Life And his Grace Folks

Believing In Jesus Claims And whatever And what Claims Others Made About him Means That it's All True So I Have a Question For you This Morning Do You Believe The true Identity And reality Of who Jesus Was And is And the Many Claims That have Been Made About him These Are all Questions And answers That we Must consider Ourselves When it Comes to The Miracle Of the Manger No one Can make This Decision For Us In Mark 16 Verses 13 To 16 We Read About a Time That Jesus Put this Important Question To his Disciples When Jesus Came to The Region Of Caesarea Philippi He Asked His Disciples Who Do People Say That The Son Of Man Is They Replied Some Say John The Baptist Others Say Elijah And Still Others Jeremiah Or One Of The Prophets But What About You He Asked Who Do You Say That I Am Simon Peter Answered You Are The Christ The Son Of The Living God My Friends If Jesus Were To Ask You This Question Who Do You Say That I Am How Would You Answer Is Christ For You Who He Claimed And Claims To Be Do You Believe The Movie Miracle On 34th Street Ends With A Dramatic Courtroom Scene That Represents The True Moment Of Decision Of The Viewers And The Characters In The Film

And That Scene Represents A Real Moment Of Decision Either He Is Or He Is Not Who He Claims To Be But When We Consider This Child Born In Bethlehem There Is An Important Change An Awesome Reversal It's A Dramatic Change Of Roles For You And Me Because When We Come Before Christ We Do Not Sit In Judgment Of Him Jesus Is The Judge Of All We Do Not Determine His Fate Rather He Determines Ours It Is Jesus Christ Who Will Determine Our Eternal Destiny It's Jesus Christ Who Is Both Lord And King Friends The Miracle Of The Manger Is That God Became Flesh

And Lived Among Us He Came Not So That He Could Send Us To Eternal Punishment But So That He Could Set Us Free My Friends This Christmas And Always If You Will Open Your Heart To Christ And Trust Him To Be Exactly Who He Claimed To Be You Will Not Be Disappointed I Promise You Is It Possible Could Jesus Christ Be Precisely Who He Claims To Be I Believe Do You Let's Pray Dear God I Do Believe The Miracle Of The Manger I Do Believe That This Child Born In Bethlehem Is Exactly Who

[37 : 49] He Claimed To Be He Is God In The Flesh The Lord Of Life The Savior For All Who Call Upon Him In Faith I Have Known About You But I Want To Know You In A Way That Is Real And Personal Pray This Prayer If That's True For You This Morning I Want To Follow You And Experience This Miracle Of Christmas In My Own Life Man You Love Year customize Let me know the joy of walking with you throughout my journey on earth and spending forever eternity with you in heaven.

Use me to extend your kingdom here on earth until that day when you return or call me home. And it's in Jesus' name, Jesus' powerful name, that we pray. Amen.

Well, remember that our Christmas Eve service will be happening live on Facebook, Christmas Eve. And believe it or not, again, that is this coming Thursday.

Can you believe that? Wow. It's this coming Thursday at 6.30 p.m. at Mountain Standard Time. So we'd love to have you join us for that.

Please join us for the music and message of Christmas. And now a peaceful benediction. My friends, be people of peace.

[39 : 37] Let peace live in your heart and share the peace of Christ with everyone you meet. Share peace by acting out of compassion, not fear.

Share peace by listening to all sides of the story. Share peace by praying for our world. And in this Advent season, we need to see, feel, and share peace.

And as you go out into the wonder of God's creation, share peace and hope with all you meet.

Amen. Well, we're going to close our service today doing just what Jesus called us to do.

We're going to share this story by listening to the words of this song. We're going to share this good news. Friends, go tell it on the mountain.

Enjoy the words and music of this beautiful song as we close this morning. And as we make our way into a holy week, moving from Advent to arrival, from coming to arriving, May the truth of the manger, the miracle of the manger, and the miracles of Christmas surround you, fill your heart, fill your home, and bring you peace and joy, hope and love.

[41 : 08] God bless you. Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere.

Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born. While shepherds kept their watching, those silent flocks by night, behold, throughout the heavens, there shone a holy light.

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born.

The shepherds feared and trembled, when low above the earth, ring out the angels' chorus, that hail the sire's blood.

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born.

[42 : 51] Down in a lonely manger, the humble Christ was born, and brought us God's salvation, that blessed Christmas morn.

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born.

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere. Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born.

Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born.