

The Son of God (Carols by Candlelight)

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[0:00] Amen. Please have a seat. And for a few moments together, we're going to think about those two passages from Luke's there. I think it is clear that this year Waitrose absolutely nailed the Christmas ad battle. I don't know if folks agree. Keira Knightley, Joe Wilkinson, it's the short advert that has everything. It has friendship, it has drama, it has romance. Of course, there's lots of delicious looking food as well. The question is, why does it work? It works because of what we can call perhaps the beauty and the beast effect. It's the unexpected, unlikely couple, the pairing that surprises, that makes the drama of the story work. When we turn to Luke's account of the birth of Jesus, we see something of the same theme that he detects, that there are unexpected, surprising wonders and combinations when we come to think about the birth of the Son of God.

So we're going to spend a few minutes just thinking about those familiar stories, but I hope that we'll discover something of the unexpected wonder, both of the miracle of Christmas and also the mission of Christmas. So to begin with the wonderful miracle of Christmas, Christmas. So over our Advent series services here as a church up until the end of December, we've been thinking about some of the names and titles that you find for Jesus in the Bible.

He is Emmanuel. He is God with us. He is Prince of Peace. He is King of Kings. This evening, as Barry was reading for us, perhaps you heard one of the most striking.

In Luke chapter 1 verse 31, Jesus is called the Son of the Most High. Verse 35, He is called the Son of God.

So we're going to think about that for a moment. Think about the reality that an angel comes to declare of the unborn baby Jesus that He is in reality the Eternal One. He was there before the universe, sustaining trillions of galaxies by the word of His mouth. He is the one who receives the worship of heaven.

[2:47] Luke tells us He is the promised one. He is this promised King, this righteous King who would rule and reign forever. And He is the one who will be perfectly filled with the Spirit. The Spirit was there. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. We get to His baptism. And the Spirit comes on Jesus like a dove. So that all that Jesus does and says is in God's power. But here's the unexpected wonder. We have the infinite glory of God wrapped in the fragility of a human body. This is a fact more fantastic than any work of fiction.

This is the fact that calls us to faith at Christmas. That the creator and sustainer of this universe and of all our lives becomes a tiny bundle of cells. A developing baby in the womb of His mother.

A child who, like every other child, will cry out for milk in total dependence and need. This is the unexpected miracle that the King of heaven, whom all the angels worship, will enter the world, not into a palace, but into a stable, not born to royalty, but born to a poor family in a backwater town. The Savior sent to reveal God's glory to the world? He's the one who'll be wrapped in cloths and placed in an animal feeding trough. Earlier this year, you may have seen the story in the news of two brothers in San Francisco who were clearing their mom's house after she passed away. And they went up into the attic and they made a remarkable discovery. That in an old cardboard box, under layers of cobwebs, under layers of old newspapers, they found a mint copy, first edition Superman comic, which, when they took it to auction, was worth over nine million dollars, the most expensive comic ever sold. Hidden for years in this old cardboard box.

As we read Luke's gospel, we are invited to discover an infinitely more valuable treasure. It's that God himself has wrapped himself in human flesh to make himself known to us personally. And so, I wonder, as it were, have you climbed the attic stairs? Have you uncovered this box and made this discovery for yourself? Here's why I would suggest this matters. That with the coming of Jesus to be God with us, making himself known to us personally, he answers so many of the deep longings within our hearts.

That longing that we have at times to connect with something bigger than ourselves. That longing that we have to find meaning. That recognition that we have deep within us that there is something more. The rise of spirituality within our nation. It is testimony that we want to connect with the divine. We want to connect with God. And the wonderful news of the Bible and of Christianity is that in Jesus, the search is over. We don't need to speculate anymore. We don't need to say, well, I think God is like this, and maybe you think God is like that. No, we see the God of glory in the face of Jesus. That to read Luke's gospel, to read his words and his actions, is to read about the words and the works of God. So, in the coming of Jesus, he answers, I think, so many of our deep longings.

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But it also answers the really important question, how can you and I have a relationship with God? So, it's really common to think about religion in the sense that, well, what I need to do is try and work my way up to God. That there are things that I must do, and I must feel certain things, and I must act in certain ways. And if I can reach that standard, then surely God will be obliged to accept me.

And the truth of the matter is that, according to the Bible, we can't meet God's perfect standard, which sounds like bad news until we understand that with the coming of Jesus, we have this wonderful announcement that the God of love, well, he's come down to us to make himself known to us so that we might know him personally. And that's not something we have to earn. That's a gift he gives to all who will put their faith in Jesus. And so, that's the wonderful miracle of Christmas that Luke presents to us. But connected to that, and secondly, we need to think about the wonderful mission of Christmas.

Now, I wonder if in the midst of all the busyness that this time of year always brings, have you ever stopped to ask yourself, what is the meaning of the Christmas season? I know here tonight we are from different cultures and backgrounds. We may have lots of different answers to that question. Perhaps when we think about the Christmas season, we think about time with family. It's a wonderful gift, isn't it? Maybe we think about a time to rest, to put work to one side, a time to feast. Maybe for us, Christmas is about trees and traditions. It might even be about church and Christmas carols.

What's the point of Christmas? What's the point of Christmas story? It's a really significant question to ask of all the many questions you and I might have about Jesus or about Christianity.

And to understand the point of Christmas, we really need to see the wonderful mission of Christmas. Because the point is that God has made himself known personally to us in Jesus, so that you and I could know God for ourselves. That God has become one of us. He has come near to us on a search and rescue mission so that we could draw near to him.

[9 : 09] If we return for a moment to the rom-com of Kira and Joe, we know that it works because it works like a fairy tale. It's not fact. You know, somehow the beard wins the heart of the beauty. It sounds like a classic fairy tale. But the wonderful reality, as Luke presents us, is that this is nothing in comparison to the true story, to the true wonder of Christmas. That here is the God of the universe, the most glorious, the most holy, the perfectly good God. And he takes on humanity to live among us, to live in true humility. And even more than that, he is issuing an invitation to the lowest, to the least, to the least likely. That there is in Luke's gospel, the great news of a God who is glorious and is full of grace. And he invites a group of shepherds into his presence. And what's true for those guys then can be true for each one of us today.

Because here's the thing we might miss about these shepherds. We're so used to the nativity story that God deliberately chose to invite them to be the first visitors. You know, of all the people he could have chosen, in all the places he could have gone to, in all of Judea, he sent the angels and chose them. Now, that's unexpected. Because in Jesus' day, shepherds were very low reputation.

They were known for being unclean. They were known for being dishonest. They literally lived on the margins of society. But the message that they hear, do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. In effect, they hear, come, meet your Savior.

The message that they hear, and it's the message of Christianity, is that you are welcome to come to know God. And Luke loves this theme, that Jesus reverses all the usual expectations.

Let me encourage you to read Luke's account of Jesus' life this Christmas season. It's a short but thrilling story. And when you read that, you find Jesus extending kindness to the outsiders, to those that nobody else would give the time of day to. We see him showing unexpected grace and favor to moral and social outcasts and failures. We see him welcoming gladly the unclean, those regarded as unclean for physical reasons and for spiritual reasons. And so, as we come to the story of the shepherds, we see that they become a canvas onto which God paints a wonderful picture of his grace, his restoring, his forgiving, his rescuing, his welcoming grace.

[12 : 39] Grace is when we get what we don't deserve from God, and we see it in the story of the shepherds. And it becomes good news for all of us. It becomes good news for people who have messed things up, and they know it. For people who don't measure up, and we feel it. It's good news for those who are looking for a peace and a hope and a joy that lasts. There's good news for those whose conscience is not clear. There's good news for those who, up until now, have turned their backs on God, that God loves to welcome because he is full of love and grace. He loves to reverse what we might expect. And so, for these shepherds just going about their day like any other day, they receive this invitation to go and meet their king. Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that's happened that the Lord has told us about.

And so, we get this insight, even as Jesus is born, that the true God of the Bible, he is a seeking, searching, and saving God. In fact, Jesus will say that himself. I came to seek and to save the lost.

He came to deal with what separates us from God so that we can know God personally. Now, how does he do that? You'll perhaps have noticed that some of our Christmas hymns and carols have spoken to us of that, that this same Jesus in the manger is the same Lord who will grow to be Jesus Christ of the cross and of the empty tomb. And so, for the way for us to be saved, the way for us to know God is through Jesus' self-giving love. The way that we know peace with God is because God in his love sent his Son to take the anger of God against all the wrong things that we have done so that we could be forgiven. And as Jesus rises from the dead, we can be fully forgiven. We can be welcomed into God's family. We can experience the great joy of life with God where he is our Savior and he is our Savior and he is our friend. Have you considered and discovered the wonderful miracle and meaning of Christmas for yourself? Let me leave you with one question and a couple of suggestions.

Luke is clear that in Jesus, God has chosen to come near to us, and that in Jesus we are being invited to know God personally. So, here's my question. Will you move nearer to Jesus in this Christmas season?

Perhaps that will look like talking to God in prayer. Maybe you haven't done that since you were a child. Maybe it'll look like reading Luke's gospel and asking God to reveal himself to you.

[15 : 46] Will you move nearer to the God who has moved near to you? And a couple of suggestions as we close that come from the shepherd's own story. When the shepherds received this great invitation to meet their King and their Savior, we are told they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby, and they're filled with joy and wonder. Will we follow them? Will we receive this invitation? Will we move towards Jesus with wonder that God loved us and gave his Son to be the Savior for us?

And then it's interesting what happens after the manger. We're told there when they'd seen Jesus, they spread the word concerning him, what had been told to them about this child.

So as we come to discover the wonder of Jesus, will you move towards others to share this wonderful news? Will you extend something of his love and kindness to the people around you?

The wonderful news of Christmas is that God in Jesus has come near to us so that you and I, we can come near to him. Amen.