

The birth of Jesus

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[0:00] Well, good morning everyone and a happy Christmas to you all. It's a real privilege to be here with you and to have the privilege of sharing from God's Word, and as we begin to just think about this passage from the Scriptures, I wonder if in your household at Christmas you've ever had the experience, particularly when there's lots of children around, when you open it, all the presents are being opened, and the room is gradually or quite rapidly filling up with lots of paper everywhere.

And then out come the bin liners and you start shoving it all in there. Have you ever had the experience of realising that somehow one of the small gifts has been scooped up with the rubbish and placed into the bin liner?

That ever happen for you? And then you have to go through the bin liner trying to find the gift and hopefully you find it. Well, this little passage, doesn't it, ends with Mary saying how she stored up and treasured these things in her heart.

And that's an important thing for us to do, to treasure in our hearts the message of Christmas, particularly as we go through the day celebrating and unwrapping the presents.

It's easy for it to get lost, isn't it? But we don't want to do that. Let's treasure these things in our hearts. And one of the things that can get lost at Christmas is really the wonder of the incarnation.

[1:31] That is the wonder of the Christmas message that God became man. In the Gospel of John, which we didn't read today, it begins the Christmas message really with these words.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And then it says that through him, through the Word, all things were created.

And then a bit later it says, and the Word became flesh. Jesus is God, and he became flesh.

That's the wonder. In fact, those words, in the beginning was the Word, or those first three words, in the beginning, appear in one other place in the Bible. Do you know where? I'm sure you do.

Genesis chapter 1 and verse? Verse 1. That says, in the beginning, God. In the beginning was the Word.

[2:36] God and the Word. And it says, God, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Through the Word in John, it says, all things were created. And the wonder, here's the first wonder, isn't it?

That when God, when Jesus created the world, he did so knowing with the full intention that he was going to come into himself, his creation.

And when he created man, the first man, he did so with the full intention of himself becoming a man, just like the one he created. I think that is marvelous.

Props to Bavinck, a theologian who put me onto that perspective. But isn't that a wonder? That when God created, when Jesus is the creator, and that when he created, he did so with a view, with a plan to become a man.

And so, when Jesus was born, it's also a wonder, isn't it, that this is God coming into this world, that the whole event went pretty much unnoticed.

[3:50] Completely, the whole, in fact, the only people that really knew anything about it at his birth were his mum and dad, it seems. It would have meant something to them. And apart from that, just the shepherds, and the shepherds only because God opened the heavens and angels came to them and revealed the message of Christmas to them.

Otherwise, it would have been, I guess, just Mary and Joseph. This awesome event that, the tremors of which we still feel today.

It was like a feather, a divine feather just floating down and lighting upon the world, as gently as it possibly could.

And yet, the tremors of that event have echoed throughout the ages, bringing people all over the world to a new life in Christ.

I think that is pretty amazing, isn't it? This is the Christmas message. It went unnoticed.

[5:01] In fact, we read, there was no guest room for Jesus. And here's the first thing for us to think about as we come to this Christmas. There was no guest room for Jesus.

When he was born, think of it like this, there was no place for Jesus, was there? There was nowhere for him. God had finally come into his world that he made, and there was no place for him anywhere.

He was born in his own hometown, as it were, and there was no place for him in his own place of origin. And that idea that there was no place for Jesus, the way that he began his life, it characterised his life.

Shortly after being born, he had to flee to Egypt. And then during his ministry, when one person said, I'll follow you wherever you go, Jesus replied, foxes have dens, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to rest his head.

No place for Jesus in this world. And not only in his birth and in his infancy, not only in his ministry, but most of all in his death.

[6:22] In his death. He was led out of the city, outside the city walls. There was no place for him in the city. And there, outside the city, on the mount, they crucified him.

That is the ultimate rejection. There was no place for Jesus in this world. There was no place for Jesus with anyone in this world.

He was rejected and forsaken and deserted. Now we're told, aren't we, that when Jesus was born, we read in verse 10, I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

Today, in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. When Jesus is the Messiah, the Lord, the word Messiah, it basically means he's the king.

God's chosen king. That's really important to get that. He is God's chosen king. That was who Jesus is. He's the chosen king and the saviour of the world.

[7:36] When the angel spoke on another occasion to Joseph, he said he is to be called, so he's the son of the most high.

He's the son of God. He's the king and he's the son of the most high God. Both of those things.

That is the one who came into the world. It was the king, the son of God, for whom there was no place for anyone.

And here's why that's important for us today. Here's a question for all of us. Is there a place for the king, the son of God, in your heart for him?

Is there a place in your heart for him? And here's why that's important. When Jesus was ultimately crucified, the two reasons were, number one, he was a blasphemer.

[8:44] The Jews, the leaders, they said, because he called himself God's son, he made himself equal with God. That was blasphemy. And so their charge against him was blasphemy.

That's why they wanted him crucified, the son of God. They wouldn't tolerate that. And the second thing, why did the Romans crucify him? Because he was the Messiah.

He was the king. And there could only be one king in Rome, and that was the emperor, Caesar. He was a rival king. He was crucified effectively for sedition. He was rejected.

He was crucified for being the king and for being the son of God, the Messiah. And today, I find that most people, what they reject about Jesus is that he is the king, their rightful king, and he is the son of God.

Now, that is put in different ways. For example, they deny that he's the son of God by denying his resurrection, by denying the virgin birth.

[9:56] You see, if Jesus is the son of God, if he is God incarnate, then those things aren't an issue, are they? But they reject that idea.

And one of the main reasons that people reject Jesus and the Christian faith is because they want to be the king, isn't it? And so, Jesus, who came into this world, largely unnoticed, no place for him. These things, these were signified what was to come. Well, he went unnoticed to the whole world then, no place for him then.

But he didn't go unnoticed by everyone. As we mentioned earlier, the shepherds, they received the glorious announcement that Jesus is two things, good news of great joy.

He's great joy. And that's in verse 10. But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

[11:09] And then in verse 14, the announcement of the angels, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.

This message, the Christmas message, is a message of great joy and peace. And there is a shortage of joy and peace in the world today, isn't there?

A great shortage of joy and peace. And that is at every level. So if you look at a world level, we're living in a war-torn world, aren't we?

In fact, we hear about the conflict between Palestine and Israel. We hear about the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. But there are many other conflicts we don't hear about.

Just don't hear about it. Doesn't make the news. Terrible conflicts. Wars have been raging for many years. Civil wars. And terrible atrocities happening in those wars.

[12:11] The Democratic Republic of Congo would be one example. Never on the news. At a world level, all the way down to us as individuals.

Families being broken up. Marriages being broken. Children estranged from their parents and from one another. Broken from...

So from a world level, at every level, all the way down. Yeah, politics. At every level, there's a lack of peace. And there's certainly a lack of joy.

Most people, their experience of joy is a moment of joy at particular moments in life. When the baby was born, or when they got married, or something like that.

These are very short moments of joy. And then maybe their lives are littered with moments, but they're moments that come and go. Well, the message of Christmas is a message of joy and peace for everyone who trusts in God that never needs to leave us.

[13:20] That's an enduring joy and an enduring peace. And we're not talking about a joy and a peace that's to be understood in this way.

We're not saying that it's an absence of things that cause us sadness. We're not saying an absence of disease. We're not saying an absence of conflict. We're not saying an absence of heartache and all those things that everyone experiences.

We all live in this world. But it is a promise of peace and joy even in the midst, even in the midst of suffering.

Jesus, he knew about that. For the joy set before him, it says, he endured the cross. He never lost sight of the joy.

So it's a message of joy and peace. Now, if you're a believer, it may well be that as I talk about an enduring peace, an enduring joy, you think, well, I don't really know about that.

[14:32] In my life, actually, a lot of the time, I'm not experiencing joy and I get anxious and all sorts of things undermine that. Well, it does when we take our eyes off of the Lord and that's the thing, isn't it?

These things, they distract us from the Lord. But I want to share two things, well, primarily really, one thing that we can all do that will mean we know and experience more of that joy and that peace than we would if we didn't do that.

And that is to do what the angels did. What did they do? They immediately, after seeing the baby, we read, they immediately went and spread the word.

Verse 17. Verse 17. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said.

They didn't just keep the good news to themselves, nor did they just come and sing and praise God. They're really good things to do. But they shared what they knew.

[15:54] And, you know, if ever you have the experience of sharing your faith, you kind of relive the joy of it and the sense of peace that we have with God, it's a reminder to ourselves.

When we preach it and proclaim it to others, the reality of it is impressed upon our own hearts. It's what we're meant to do, to share the good news.

I want to encourage you, whatever opportunities you have, avail yourselves of those. whether it's through this church or through Grace Church or any other means, share the message of Christmas, the birth of a saviour.

But the peace, that we'll find joy in doing that, and peace, but in terms of the enduring peace, we come back, don't we, to Mary, who treasured these things in her heart.

I often think about the parable that Jesus gave of the four grounds, of the sower of the seed and the four grounds. And one of them is a path. It says the seed, which is the word of God, was scattered here, there, and everywhere, liberally, generously.

[17:09] Some of it landed on the path. It says the birds of the air came and snatched it away. And we can be like that. It's like we receive this wonderful gift, the good news of a saviour.

And we can hear it preached just like this. And then we walk out of the church and we forget it. It's snatched away. And so I want to encourage us to treasure the message of Christmas in our hearts. God became man. And he was rejected right from the start all the way through until that final rejection because there was no place for him in this world or in the hearts of men.

What about you? I asked the question at the beginning. Does he have that top place, that primary place in your heart?

If he does, share the good news. Treasure it. And if so far he hasn't, if Jesus hasn't, if there's been no place for him in your heart, then know this.

[18:36] The rejection of Jesus as king, the rejection of Jesus as the son of God was the reason that people crucified him.

And I want to say to you today, don't stand with the crucifiers of Christ. But make a place in your heart for Jesus.

And you can do that by repenting and turning to him and thanking him and receiving him as your Lord and Saviour.

I want to encourage you to do that. Whoever you're here with, perhaps you can speak to them about that. Let's pray. Father, we do thank you for this Christmas message.

Thank you for Jesus. thank you for the incarnation. Thank you for the wonderful gift that Jesus represents to us.

[19:43] Peace and joy. Enduring. Worth speaking about. Worth sharing. Grant to us this Christmas, we pray, that Jesus might be the one that we celebrate.

Not just today, but every day. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.