

The saviour has come

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[0 : 00] And happy Christmas to you all. You can smile. It is Christmas Day. I know there are many things on our hearts, many challenges that we might be facing, many stresses even over the dinner that's lying ahead or things this afternoon.

But this is a moment to share in the joy of the angels, isn't it? Do you believe angels are real? Yeah, the Bible says they are. They'll either scare you or you won't notice that they're there.

But they will always help God's people and point us to Jesus. Let's pray together, shall we, as we come to God's word. Lord God, we thank you for the privilege of gathering on this day out of tradition where we remember your great gift to us in the birth of Jesus.

And I pray, Lord, just the least few minutes that the people will forget about me, really, and know the work of your Holy Spirit, strengthening and building up the church and bringing conviction and joy and salvation to all who are gathered here.

We pray for the forgiveness of our sins. And we know that these things can block our hearts even today from receiving your word to us. So give us soft hearts, fill us with your Holy Spirit, and give us ease to hear, we pray in Jesus' name.

[1 : 16] Amen. Amen. Thank you. Thank you so much for the invitation. It's lovely to be together as churches on this special day together. So I want us to look for a few minutes at these words in Luke chapter 2, if you've got a Bible in front of you, and they're the words that describe how the shepherds responded to the visit of the angels.

Rightly, we've just sung, the big emphasis often is on the angels appearing, the message to the angels, extraordinary things. But for a few minutes, I wanted to think about how the shepherds responded and how that's going to encourage us and speak to us today.

You'll probably know that Luke is writing his gospel to bring a sense of confidence and assurance to his readers, particularly this person called Theophilus at the beginning of Luke's gospel.

And he writes to him to reassure him about the things that have taken place amongst them. So he's looked back at the eyewitness accounts, he's recorded these wonderful things that have happened to bring an assurance and a confidence to us today.

And we need that, don't we? So these extraordinary events, we think of the angels coming from heaven and the message of the angel of the Lord to the shepherds. Do not be afraid, they'll bring you great news and great joy for to you today is born in the town of David a saviour who is Christ the Lord.

[2 : 41] Extraordinary message and the glorious appearing of the multitude of the heavenly hosts saying, glory be to God on high. We've heard those words already. All these things, says Luke, actually happened.

They're real. The Christian faith is based on the real events of history. And so Luke has carefully investigated these things. Mary was there, another eyewitnesses around all these events as well. So they've got these extraordinary events. But what happened next? Well, the first thing we see, I've got four different R's actually, so you know that we're going to come to the end when you find the fourth R.

I'm sorry, I don't think, I'm not sure if I'm allowed to do this, but I'm doing it anyway. I'm putting it up there. The first R, can you read that? What's the first R? Rushing. The first thing we see is that the shepherds begin to rush from the fields to Bethlehem.

There is a lot going on in life, particularly around Christmas. And maybe you're sitting there slightly dazed because you've been rushing around like a headless chicken over the last few days in the build-up to Christmas.

[3 : 50] Brighton has been particularly packed of people doing their last-minute Christmas shopping, rushing around, and things at last are calm today. But here we see the shepherds rushing.

The angels have left them. They've returned to heaven. And the shepherds say to each other, in verse 15, let's go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

And so they hurried off. Go straight to Bethlehem. Of course, the shepherds, simple night watchmen, security guards, staying out in the fields, away from everybody else, have this extraordinary encounter from heaven.

But this encounter causes them to change everything for that night. They change their location. They change their focus. They're willing to lose their jobs over this.

They go straight to Bethlehem to find out what the angels have said to them, whether it's such a true thing. Luke is helping us to kind of know something of the certainty of these events to encourage us.

[5 : 01] And it's interesting that the shepherds are really chasing down what they have been told. They want to see with their own eyes what this sign is that the angels have told them. So they're not making this up.

They're following the sign. And Luke is writing it for us who were not there so that we can follow the sign and we can know certainty of these things too. And what the sign is, of course, is not just the message from the angel of the Lord that for to you a saviour has been born.

He's the Messiah. He's the Christ. He's the Lord. But here's the sign. You're going to find the Messiah, the King of Heaven, lying in a manger, which of course is a cattle trough.

You're going to find the saviour, promised from heaven, who will save you from your sins and rescue God's people. Mighty power, saviour, lying in straw. The hero of heaven in a load of hay. The Lord of all, so little and lowly. That is the sign. Now sometimes you forget that, don't we? Because we know the story so well.

[6 : 07] But the extraordinary truth that the Messiah has come, but he will be found in a manger. The world around us is probably looking for something showbiz.

They would like actually the pizzazz of the angels, wouldn't they? If they're going to believe. But actually for the shepherds and for us, it's the Messiah in the manger. That's the sign to take us to faith.

The Messiah in the manger. So the shepherds are rushing to Bethlehem. What are you racing towards this Christmas?

What are you racing towards in life, actually? Where is your focus? I'm all over the place. We've got a springer spaniel at home.

He's a crazy dog. If you want to take him for a walk or a run or be led by him on a walk, you're very welcome to do that. But he just can't keep his focus. He's charging over this way and then he's charging over that way.

[7 : 07] He's charging over this way. And I can be like that sometimes. I just can't keep my focus. At one moment, I'm focusing on getting the budget right. I've got to get the budget right for the family. And then, oh, that's so interesting over there.

I can't keep focusing. Here, there, everywhere. Maybe you're like that. The world is like that. We can't keep our focus. The shepherds head straight to the manger. They head straight to Jesus. When this divine revelation comes from heaven, they go straight to Jesus. Where is your focus this Christmas? What are you racing towards in life? Even as churches, we can be so caught up in organizing and getting ourselves, doing good things, that we forget that our whole life is to do the shepherds.

And that is to hurry straight to Jesus. Hurry straight to Jesus. Hurry straight to Jesus. See the baby lying in a manger. That's the first thing. Racing.

What are we rushing towards? Maybe we'll have a rest this afternoon. That'll be good. The second R, sorry if you can't read it very well, it's slightly psychedelic font there as well.

[8 : 13] But what's the second R? Can you see that? Retelling. The shepherds rush to Bethlehem and then they retell. So it's a wonderful truth, isn't it? That verse 17, after seeing the angels, the shepherds, after seeing the angels, they go straight to Bethlehem and what they see is just what the angels have said.

They see Joseph and Mary and this baby wrapped in cloth lying in a manger. And after seeing them, as the angels have said, the shepherds then report or retell the message they were told about this child.

It was such an awesome event that they had to share what they had been told. What will you have to report to others this Christmas?

Already in our inbox, we've had letters from friends and family members telling us what's happened over the year. Lovely photos. And I really appreciate them to find out all the information.

Maybe this afternoon, you'll be with friends or your family and you'll share some stories of things that have happened over this year. Many people in life just report trivial things but make a big splash of it on social media.

[9 : 31] Maybe you're older and thinking, what is this obsession with just getting the perfect photo, the perfect account of what you did last Tuesday afternoon on Be Real or whatever it is. People were reporting all the time about trivial things and yet the shepherds here are reporting the most important thing that has ever happened and that is the announcement of the angels that has taken them to Jesus.

We all have a report to tell, don't we? Some of you have been Christians for many years and you've got that report telling you of how you came to faith in those early days.

And you've got your testimony. But a bit like the shepherds here, we've also got the stories to tell of what the Holy Spirit, what the living God has been doing in our lives most recently as he's taken us to Jesus again and again in our hour of need and how we're growing as Christians.

We've got things to tell and things to share. And so what we find is the shepherds, as they came to Bethlehem and they saw the sign in front of them, immediately they were convicted and convinced and just had to tell everyone who was there reporting.

Maybe you don't have faith in Jesus yet and you're thinking, well, what do I have in my life to retell? Well, when you come to Jesus, you find that your life is remade around him and you have a wonderful story to tell.

[10 : 54] The church, of course, that's why we kind of go through the tradition every Christmas and of course we know when Easter happened as Jesus died and he rose again. We keep going through the cycle of these traditions because our job is not to make up this to fit the culture.

It is to retell the story into the world to bring great news, isn't it? So we're retelling, we're retelling the old yet ever new story of Jesus. Maybe you came to this service this morning thinking, oh, no, not another Christmas service.

No, we're retelling and it does us good and it fills us up so we can retell to the world. What do you have to tell to your friends and neighbours after this Christmas period? It's the same wonderful story.

Christ was born for you. May the Lord fill our hearts with conviction that we want to retell and retell and retell. Don't change the message but retell it.

Okay, so that's the retelling. The next R, I've got four R's in total, remember, is, can anyone read that? Sorry, you haven't got your glasses with you.

[12 : 00] What's the other R? Reacting. Rushing, retelling and reacting. So in our passage we see the shepherds retelling what the angels had said and there's Joseph, there's Mary and of course the baby was listening but it's just a baby and of course we're told in the passage that there were others, there were crowds there who were listening as well.

So we've got two reactions that come to what the shepherds were saying. First of all it says that all who heard were amazed and then we're told more personally that Mary treasured up all these things in her heart and meditated on them.

First of all all who heard were amazed. is anything going to amaze you this Christmas?

Of course if you're a Christian you come back and back and back and you go through this cycle of retelling the story always about the children isn't it? And we try and get the children amazed by traditions and ideas and presents but Jesus just a baby in a manger amazes amazes grow your confidence in that retelling the story in the power of the Holy Spirit is enough to amaze a world amaze again if you haven't got faith in Jesus is there anything in your life that truly amazes you? Being sold a lie aren't we? If you buy this or have this experience or do that you'll be amazed and maybe there's a little tingling feeling that goes Jesus amazes in fact Luke writes his gospel and you see the ministry of Jesus the Messiah the promised king as he goes into his ministry as an adult before he goes to the cross as he healed the sick as he's taught with authority as he raised the

dead as he drove out demons time and time again people were amazed at Jesus amazed at Jesus amazed at his birth amazed at his life and his ministry amazed at his death and his resurrection he amazes the world you may think what impact can we have upon Brighton retell the story of Jesus be those who are the amazed and you will find that he is working in others around you amazed at Jesus it's the work of the Holy Spirit isn't it even today you're beginning to see the glory of God and the face of Christ and you're beginning to be amazed at Jesus it's the work of the Holy Spirit isn't it amazed at this message it's weird isn't it because the message about Jesus came not because the angels walked into town that would be amazing wouldn't it the whole having these hosts descending upon

[15 : 05] Bethlehem upon Brighton but it was the shepherds I guess they were the guys out in the fields that you wouldn't really hang out with would you they were the night watchmen the security guards the rough sleepers and yet they're out amazing everyone with the story of angels and the promised sign of the Messiah so don't be surprised as to who God uses to amaze people about his son Jesus he can even use you too so that's the amazement of the crowds and don't be long for that again I was just last night just the few minutes between all the things going on in our house I was just starting to read you may have heard of him but the great preacher of the 1700s George Whitefield and it was a little account of his life by again a wonderful Anglican bishop called J.C. Ryle of the 1800s and he just described the impact upon that this one preacher

George Whitefield had as he was kind of kicked out of the established churches he went out to where people were and actually people were amazed to hear the gospel as the Holy Spirit came in power and many thousands became Christians God can amaze people today it's wonderful isn't it Mary more personally in this passage the mother of the baby Messiah the Lord Jesus Christ we're told that Mary is much more personal much more measured she ponders over these things she treasures them up in her heart and she meditates over these things of course Mary has already had an angelic encounter hasn't she around the promise of the birth of Jesus the angel Gabriel comes to her and announces who he is and of course now that the birth has come there are stories of other angels and heaven is kind of announcing the birth of Jesus but Mary it seems is much more measured more personal she's dwelling over these things the crowds are amazed Mary is meditating over these things and again that's the sign of the Holy Spirit and there can be a power amazed and that can come and go but there's the more treasuring the building up of these things and the growing of faith and trust and understanding comes over time personally

I don't know what's going on in your heart or what's happened over this Christmas season whether you're just hard and dead to Jesus at the moment or whether there's this warmth and growing of faith in you as you treasure up the things of Christ in your heart may the Holy Spirit make that real to you treasuring Jesus this Christmas just find a little bit of time to do that even in the business of church life and the carol service and things it's wonderful to be together but take an opportunity just to treasure up Jesus the gift of Jesus in your heart this Christmas before God be a personal worshipper as well as a corporate amazing person amazing person a person who's amazed okay last hour are you ready for this can anyone guess what the last hour is well done we've had the shepherds rushing the shepherds retelling the people reacting what's going to happen what's going to be the last hour rebirth that's a good biblical one anyone else rejoicing ah it could be rejoicing I've got returning okay returning this little fact is sometimes overseen because of all the angels and everything that's going on but the shepherds who began in the fields at night keeping watch of their flocks end up going back to their fields keeping watch over their flocks at night they've had this amazing experience and they've been used by God to announce the birth of this baby into Joseph and Mary and all those around they've amazed people and now we find them returning home I don't know about you but Christmas is often about in our culture it's often about the build up isn't it the expectation of Christmas the Advent calendars the excitement of school plays and all the shopping everything builds up to Christmas Christmas day comes and then it's a bit of an anticlimax and it's New Year and then it's January we're back to January and we have to return don't we maybe you're cynical because you have to return shepherds after being used by God and experiencing this amazing encounter simply return to their flocks to their job to their rough sleeping the announcement of Jesus didn't give them wealth or fame or prosperity or even physical health it just brought them back to where they were before but they returned with the joy of the angels ringing in their hearts isn't that amazing the change in them was just extraordinary maybe you feel slightly down about the whole Christmas thing because you know that January is coming

God has made you to return he wants you to carry on with your job your family you'll continue to face the challenges that you faced before but the difference is if you have come to acknowledge and listen to the sign about Jesus is that you return with the joy of heaven the hope of heaven ringing in your hearts the language of the shepherds here is that they are praising God the same kind of language that was used of the angels as they announced the message it's ringing in them isn't it we can still return to normality but be transformed for eternity with the glory of God in our hearts isn't that wonderful the other thing of course is that they returned with the praise and the joy of the angels but they returned also with a kind of inner confidence and certainty in this message so you notice at the end of the passage that they're going and they're praising God for everything that the Lord had told them through the angels in other words the message had been there they'd gone to the sign they'd seen the baby wrapped in cloth lying tightly in a manger and they returned home and part of their joy was the sign was true it was real they had a conviction that this was real it was true and remember Luke is writing his gospel to Theophilus and to us today so that we may know the certainty of the things that have been taking place and that we've been informed about that we have that settled confidence at times you'll have the amazement and hopefully you'll have huge spiritual encounters but the most of our life as we journey to heaven we'll just be returning to normality with a certainty and confidence that this is true the baby in the manger is my Messiah [22 : 08] I belong to Jesus and we'll know the joy of heaven in our hearts as we do so I believe when the word of God is read and the word of God is preached Jesus who's no longer a baby in the manger but lived died for our sins rose again reigning from heaven he is ministering by his Holy Spirit to all who gather and listen this is a holy moment where heaven is open and God is speaking to us to you what is his word to you rush head straight to Jesus stop being distracted go straight to Jesus retell share share what God if you had no experiences of what God is doing in your life at this Christmas time pray that you would be aware of what he's doing around you as he builds confidence in the gospel and works in this city react is it time that actually you understood what the shepherds understood and you were amazed at Jesus he's just a baby in a manger he's the Messiah he's the Lord he's your saviour of course return return back to normality but do so with confidence that this is real this is true again just think about

George Whitfield you don't know about George Whitfield don't worry about it but J.C. Ryle the bishop J.C. Ryle just said he quoted someone else he quoted John Newton you've heard John Newton amazing grace I'll sweep this out and save the rich and John Newton of the same kind of era said about George Whitfield there's something about him that when he when he preached and he just preached Jesus the Messiah he kept preaching Jesus the gospel he kept preaching the gospel he says when he preached his preaching was never in vain in other words there's always a response there's always a response God save people and we believe that God does that today even today in your life don't let this moment go past put your faith in Jesus can I pray for us we'll close that bit Lord thank you so much for just this little story you've given to us of these shepherds who had their moment and then just disappeared thank you that through that you you speak to our hearts and encourage us that the gospel is real and Lord we most of us have not seen an angel but we thank you that the message of the angels has been given to us by your Holy Spirit through the word through the retelling of the gospel and I pray you'd help us to treasure it in our hearts this Christmas we pray in Jesus name
Amen Amen