

Last Christmas

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[0:00] And sometimes it is good to tell a story and to tell a story with the whole thing. Sometimes we can get bogged down in the details and we forget to see the whole picture.

! When you think about Christmas, boys, girls and adults, sometimes we think about songs. I wonder if any of the children here have got a favourite Christmas song.

Anyone got a favourite Christmas song? Jingle Bells. Jingle Bells is a great Christmas song. Favourite Christmas song?

Mary, did you know? Very nice song. Grace, have you got a favourite Christmas song? You heard Jingle Bells. Mary got lots of votes for Jingle Bells. Little Town of Bethlehem, that's a good song too. Any other favourite songs people have? The Twelve Days of Christmas. Well, there we are. That sounds like a really long time to spend with your family, doesn't it?

[1:09] The Twelve Days of Christmas. You really need lots of presents, don't you, to see yourself through all of those occasions. Now, my favourite Christmas record is Phil Spector's Christmas album.

I have a vinyl copy of this. Now, my son, who's in Canada, long way away, he's a very big son. He's much taller than me.

He remembers Christmas and he remembers us playing the songs on this. I don't think it's got Jingle Bells on it. It does start with White Christmas and it finishes with Silent Night. I know that. And he remembers that and he decided that he wanted to remember something of Christmas. We haven't seen him for a couple of years. He's a long way away in Canada. So he bought himself a copy of this on vinyl too. And he took a recording of it playing on his record player and posted it on our family WhatsApp.

So I put my copy on and I took a video of a song playing from the album and I posted it on our family WhatsApp too.

[2:13] Just to kind of remember that wonderful album and the great songs that are in it. There are lots of songs that might be going around in your head because they've been going on in the radio and on the supermarket and different places.

I wish it could be Christmas every day. There was a man, really, there was a man who for one whole year celebrated Christmas every day.

Every day he used to watch a video of the Queen's speech. He used to eat a full Christmas lunch every day. I don't know whether, like Mr. Bean, he gave himself a Christmas card every day as well and looked surprised when he received it.

I wish it could be Christmas every day. All I want for Christmas is you. That's another song. Merry Christmas, everybody.

There's also the song Last Christmas. It's kind of one of the most well-known Christmas songs. Again, it features again and again through the radio and supermarkets and so on.

[3:22] Last Christmas. 400 million pounds that they receive in royalties from that particular song every year. Last, sorry? 400,000.

Yeah, thanks for that. Thanks for keeping me on track there. 400,000 pounds. Yeah, that's quite a lot of money, isn't it? For that song that some people might find a little annoying.

But that song has also been made into a film recently. The film, surprisingly called, Last Christmas. And in the film, the main character is a lady called Kate.

Kate and her family came to this country from Croatia. And Kate wants to be a singer. Kate doesn't very often get jobs as a singer.

She's really struggling to get a job. And in fact, she's recovering from a huge operation. She's recovering from a heart transplant. And she is quite a self-centered young woman.

[4:27] She really only cares very much about herself. Although she's had a heart transplant, she eats most of the time junk food. Which, as you know, is not great, is it? It's not good to eat junk food.

Particularly if you've just had a heart transplant. But one day, in the film, Kate meets a mysterious stranger.

Tom. And Tom gets her to think about a different way of living. Tom gets her to think about maybe eating a bit differently.

Thinking a bit differently. Maybe getting on with her family a bit better. That's a Christmas message for you, isn't there? And she does. She begins to move away from a self-centered life.

A destructive path. And she begins to move towards a different way of living. A different way of thinking. And one of the things that Tom does for Kate.

[5:27] Is to say to her. Look up. Look up. I wonder if you've ever looked up. In Calvary Evangelical Church. You know, maybe.

Maybe there's a spider or two. Or a fly that's been caught somewhere. Up there. You know, I've been walking down London Road. The last couple of Sundays. Because I got the train here from Lansing.

And I've been told. When I go different parts of the country. And different parts of the world. It's really good to look up. And I have. Have you looked up in London Road? Look up beyond the shops.

That all kind of look pretty much the same. And you see that the buildings are really very special. Behind the shop fronts. Just look up. Look up and see.

Look up in here. Look up when you're around and about. When I go to a country called Latvia. And the capital called Riga. They say look up.

[6:26] Because the buildings have got amazing decorations. On the tops and the roofs of the building. There's one building with an amazing black cat.

On the roof. And there's a wonderful story about the black cat. A man. Who was a businessman. Tried to get into a special club for businessmen.

But they didn't want him to come in. So they put. He put the black cat. On the roof. Of his house. And he turned the black cat. With its bottom.

Towards the clubhouse. That wouldn't let him in. Oh. That's a bit rude isn't it perhaps. But then after a while. They decided they'd let him in.

So he moved the cat. So that the face was turning towards the club. Look up you see. You can miss a lot of things. You can miss many many things. If you don't look up.

[7:22] And see what's there. You know. Do you ever see people. Walking around. Walking around. Oh man. What are they looking at?

They're not looking up are they? They're looking down so often. Looking at their phones. Wondering what's on their phone. What message they might have received. The message to look up is a really powerful one.

It's worth us thinking about on Christmas day. Look up. Look up. And think about this amazing message that we've heard about earlier in the children's talk.

About God becoming man. About God coming. Being born amongst us as a baby. Now children. If you've still got your envelope. And your envelope is not open. And your chocolate's not been eaten. Open your envelope. And in it there is a sheet.

[8:22] And on the back of the sheet. There's a little statement. I want you to think about in a minute. And maybe. If you're able to read it out loud for us.

That would be great. In a moment. So get your envelope out. Take a look. And maybe you could read that verse for us.

So nice and loud from the word for God so loved. So. Perish.

Excellent. Thank you Isaac. That's great. And thank you for the others as well.

For doing that. Beautiful. Let me take a picture. Watch out what I think. How's living on the moon?

[9:53] Amazing. We like it. If there is a spare one going back seat. Bing. Beautiful. Let me take a picture. Oh.

Watch out what I think. Ha ha ha ha. Whoa. Whoa. How's living forever? We like it. Okay. How's living forever?

We like it. You know. I don't think living forever is very attractive. Is it? Living forever has very little attractions.

If you're a dull life. Living forever is a nightmare. Isn't it? Living forever is not what God promises. God promises as we read.

That we might have eternal life. You know Jesus once prayed this. He prayed this is eternal life. That I might know you. The only true God.

[10:52] And Jesus Christ whom you have sent. What we're promised. Is a relationship. With a wonderful. Living God. That lasts forever.

The very best experience. The very best relationship. That never ends. Not something dull. Not something kind of. Not worth having. But something. Really.

Amazing. You know one Christmas. Like this. Had a service. Speaking at the service. And there was a young man called Richard. Richard was.

Around about. 20 years old. His brother had been coming to church. For quite a while. And he'd been coming once or twice. And he came on Christmas morning. And I was preaching on that verse.

That the children so helpfully read to us. John 3.16. About God so loving the world. That he gave his one and only son. That whoever believes him. Should not perish. But have everlasting life.

[11:48] And Richard after the service. Came to me. And he said. I believed in Jesus. Today. That was a wonderful present.

That was a wonderful Christmas gift. Richard. Had. Come into the. Friendship. With the living God. That would last forever.

Father. I still. Still in touch with Richard. It's lovely to see. How he's growing. In his faith. In the Lord Jesus Christ. It's 20 years or so now. He's a. He's a 40 something.

Man now. With children. Of his own. He'd looked up. You see. He'd looked up. From the ordinary. Everyday life. Here and now.

He'd looked up. And he'd seen something. About Jesus. Of course. That happened. As we think about. The whole story. As those. Shepherds. Looking after sheep. And if you saw.

[12:44] All creatures. Great and small. Yesterday. Might know. That farmers. Sometimes worry. About sheep. A shepherd. On Christmas Eve. With a. Dying sheep. It can be.

A distressing thing. You're. You're worried. Perhaps. As a shepherd. About your sheep. You're maybe. Having a. Bit of time out. A cup of tea. Or a. Game of cards.

And suddenly. The. The whole. Sky. Fills with light. And there is. This announcement. We've got good news. For you. Don't worry. We're not coming. To remind you.

Of unpaid taxes. We're coming. To remind you. That there's good news. Good news. That a savior. Has been born. In. The town of David. Good news. Of salvation.

For. You. And of course. The wonderful thing is. As we. Read in the story. In Luke chapter 2. The good news. Is good news. Because it is.

[13:37] True news. That's what makes it. Good news. You know. I could say. Couldn't I. To the children here. You know. Forget about. The ten pounds.

You're going to get. A million pounds. At lunchtime. And I'd be. Good news. But their parents. Want me to say. It's not. True news.

It's only. Good news. If it's true news. And we read about. The shepherds. They went. To. Bethlehem. And they saw.

It was just. As the angels. Had said. They really did find. A baby. In a manger. A feeding trough. For an animal. And he was wrapped in.

Cross. They saw. It was true. And thus. They. Returned. Glorifying. And praising God. For all the things. That they had heard. And seen. As it was told. They looked up.

[14:33] You see. And looking up. They received a message. That changed their lives. Or the. Or the wise men. The magi. Looking up.

And seeing a star. Seeing an unusual. Star in the sky. Now I've got a bit of a theory. About these. Magi. I think probably.

They came from. Babylon. Babylon. Probably. They. Were people. Who liked to. Mess around in libraries. Read interesting books. About this.

That. And the other. They liked to. Explore things. They were. Following the science. And I think. That they came across. They came across.

A book. A very ancient book. A book. Written by a man. Called Daniel. In the Old Testament. And Daniel's. Full of sums. And confusing numbers. And I think. These.

[15:26] Magi. They saw. An unusual star. In the sky. And they. Read the book of Daniel. And they thought. Hey. Maybe. Something's going on. Looking up.

They put. Two and two together. And they. Got on their camels. They. Packed their gifts. And they went. To find. Who.

Was at the. End of that star. You know. Strange things. Can make people. Think about Jesus. Can't they. It might be. A star in the sky.

It might be. A whole bunch of angels. It might be. The birth of your first child. It might be. The death. Of someone that you love. It might be. A change in your circumstances. It might be.

The fact that you've been ill. Or someone you love is ill. You suddenly think. That maybe there is more. To life than this. You look up. From. The ordinary. In the everyday. And you begin to think about. Things that might be.

[16:22] More real than that. And they reach. Jesus. And someone has said. The surest way of finding Jesus. Is to determine.

In advance. To give your all to him. As soon as you find him. And to hold. Nothing. Back. The wise men. They come. And they worship.

Jesus. Because they see. He is the most special. Individual. In all. The universe. Matthew. Who wrote. The gospel.

That has that story. About the magi. He was a. Hard working man. He was a tax collector. You know. After. The end of October. When we file.

Our tax returns. Taxmen. Are very busy. They're in their. Counting house. They're counting the money. They're making sure. That you've declared. All that you should. About your taxes.

[17:19] And. They're. They're working. They're. They're at a computer. They're at their books. And they're looking down. One day. One day. Matthew chapter.

Nine. In verse nine. As Jesus. Went on from there. He saw a man named Matthew. Sitting. At a tax collector's booth. Follow me. He told him.

And Matthew. Got up. And followed him. Matthew. Matthew. Looked up. He looked up. At a man. Who was worth more than all the money.

He'd been counting. At his table. He looked up. And he saw. Someone. Who was worth. Following. Someone who was worth. Giving.

His whole. Life to. You know. Sometimes. Someone. Comes into our life. So. Unexpectedly. And captures our heart. That our lives.

[18:15] Are never. Ever. The same. Again. Think for me. Jesus and my wife.

Are the two people. That have done that. Someone comes. Unexpectedly. Into your life. And he says. Follow. Me. Follow.

Me. Look up. And follow me. Coming back to the film. There was a bit of a twist. At the end of the film. It's not quite like. Darth Vader's.

Luke. I am your father. It's not quite. As big. An end as that. But remember. Kate had had a heart transplant. The odd thing about the film.

Is that Tom. This mysterious friend. Keeps disappearing. And then at the end of the film. They realize. That in fact. Tom. Is not alive at all. He died a year before.

[19:12] And it was his heart. That was in. Kate. That's how the story went. No. Sorry. Yeah. Sorry about that spoiler. Preachers spoil every film.

Last Christmas. She sings. That song at the end of the film. Last Christmas. I gave you my heart. But the very next day. You gave it away. This year. To save me from tears. I'll give it to someone special. Maybe. To someone special. When someone comes. Into our life. And says. Follow me. Captures our heart. Everything. Is. Different. We know the. Christmas song. What can I give him. Poor as I am. If I were a shepherd. I would give a lamb. If I were a wise man. I would do my part. Yet. [20:12] What can I give him. Give him. My heart. Now. We're not talking about heart transplant. You're not laying on the floor. And having your heart. Ripped open. And you don't join the zipper club. Just means that. You want to give your life. To this Jesus. Who has given. His life. For. You. In John's gospel. There is a. A lovely statement. In John chapter one. Is this. Jesus was in the world. And though the world was made. Through him. The world did not recognize him. He came to an act which was his own. But his own did not receive him. Yet to all who. Did receive him. To those who believed in his name. He gave the right. To become. The children. Of God. Kate. [21:11] In the film last Christmas. Received the heart. Of a stranger. That allowed her. To live. We celebrate today. On Christmas day. The giving of. The son of God. Who gives his. Whole life. In order that we might live. In a relationship with him. As his child. And experience eternal life. The most fantastic life. That will never. Ever. End. Just imagine for a moment. That this was. Your last. Christmas. Christmas. Now of course. For a lot of people. In the last 18 months. That's been. More than an academic question. There have been. Healthy. Fit and well. Individuals. Who have passed from time. To eternity. People we might not have. Expected. To die. What about if this was your. [22:09] Last. Christmas. There was an obituary. It was written. About a Frenchman. And the obituary. Said this. He passed out of this world. Before he understood. Why he had come into this world. He passed out of this world. Before he had. Understood why he had entered into this world. What a tragedy. To live our last Christmas. Without discovering. Why Jesus came. In the first. Christmas. God's. God's. Loving gift. That we might not. Lose everything. But gain everything. By gaining. Him. Let's pray. Let's pray.