

# Christmas is over - now what?

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 29 December 2019

Preacher: Rev Trevor Hunt

[ 0 : 00 ] Last Lord's Day evening we looked in general at the first Christmas or just after the birth of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew and chapter 2.

And we saw that at that first Christmas not everything was jolly. We have grown accustomed perhaps to seeing all the jolliness in the stores.

And it gives a false idea of Christmas season, the Christmas season. There are cries of pain and anguish at this time.

And not everyone is celebrating and not everyone is joyful. And we should always be aware of that. There are needy people all around us. Just as the situation in the coming of Jesus was not all roses and sweetness and light.

We looked in general at the fact that Herod sought to kill the baby Jesus but because he couldn't find him murdered all the baby boys of Bethlehem.

[ 1 : 34 ] A terrible crime against the people of this town. As we though move away from Christmas and begin to move towards a new year, I believe that this same passage has something to say to us in the circumstances of what happened.

And it's about how we deal with trials and temptations that come to our lives. Because we are caught up in the same warfare that was going on in the time that Jesus came.

Let me read to you again some verses from Matthew's Gospel. Beginning at Gospel chapter 2, beginning at verse 13.

And we'll read to the end of the chapter again. And note as we read where it is that Matthew says that this is a fulfillment of prophecy.

So from verse 13. So from verse 13. Now when they, that's the wise men, had departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, Rise up, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt and remain there until I tell you.

[ 3 : 12 ] For Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him. And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod.

This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Out of Egypt I called my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he'd been tricked by the wise men, became furious and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem, in all that region, who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children.

She refused to be comforted because they are no more. But when Herod died, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel.

For those who sought the child's life are dead. And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

[ 4 : 44 ] But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there and being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee.

And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

So then, the first Christmas season will soon be over, but what then? What then for us?

What do we learn? It's said that in World War I, the British and German soldiers played football together and exchanged gifts on Christmas Day, but the next day they were back to war.

Christmas can delude us into thinking that all is right in the world. The war has ceased, but it hasn't.

[ 5 : 55 ] There's a cosmic war that still rages, and will do so until the coming of Christ and his full and final triumph.

Christ has already defeated the enemy, but he still fights on. And we should remember that that battle has not yet ended.

Satan seeks still to destroy our faith, if he could, or at least to make our witness impotent, so that we're ineffectual.

And I would dare to suggest that perhaps in our own generation, he has made something of a good job about it, because we see the church in decline, and Christianity debunked and ridiculed and ashamed.

He rages against us. He's opposing us. And he wants to wipe us out.

[ 7 : 14 ] Don't be under any illusions about this. Our enemy is still at work, and we must resist him.

And under God's hand, we must take the ground that has been lost to him. We need to win back our nation for Christ.

It's an impossible task for us, but that's what we're called to. But we're not left to ourselves. The Holy Spirit is with us, and will work through us.

But we have to also, in faith, as it were, take up our weapons. And we have to war against his agents and his influences in our day.

And last Thursday, we looked at how we are to be lights of the world.

[ 8 : 30 ] And that's what we are. We're light, shining in darkness, the darkness of our day. We're sought to prevent the deterioration of our communities and of our national life.

We're there to bear witness and testimony in this way. To bring people back to the truth of God's word.

To those moral standards that God has laid down. But above all, to bring them under the gospel. And to bring them to Jesus Christ.

So how are we going to apply Christmas to tomorrow, and the next day, and the next year? Well, I suggest to you that there are some general principles that we can draw from these events in chapter 2 of Matthew's Gospel.

We see, first of all, that God was there protecting, particularly his son.

[ 9 : 51 ] But the whole, in Christ, the whole of the church, represented, I believe, by Mary and Joseph.

They were protected by, or their protection was evident by the prophecies.

And I said to you to mark those prophecies as we read. And there was one in the earlier bit of the chapter which we didn't read.

There are four prophecies here that were given over the span of 700 years in the Old Testament. But here they are all suddenly fulfilled in this one chapter of Matthew's Gospel.

And Matthew's key word is fulfilled. What he's pointing to is that God is at work. He's pointing to the fact that God has known from the beginning what's going to happen because he's planned it.

[ 10 : 59 ] He's pointing to the fact that God is sovereign. Nothing happens by chance. Nothing happens without God and apart from God.

And God is working his purposes out. And these prophecies being fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in his coming.

And Matthew will go on to bring other fulfillments as he goes through the Gospel. But we see that God is at work.

God is carrying out what he intends. And evil people like Herod cannot stop it. They try to prevent God's purposes and to destroy the Gospel.

Even from within the Church. Which here in Britain is at work with the attempt to destroy the Gospel from within the Church.

[ 12 : 06 ] And Satan is sadly the best attendee at Church. And he's always working. And he's always seeking to destroy our faith in any way he can.

And although he doesn't have all power, he knows us extremely well. He knows when we're tired.

He knows when we're feeling down in the dumps. He knows how to distract our attention and so on. But he's always at work. He's always scheming. He's always seeking to defeat the Gospel.

In us and even by us. And we have to be always on our alert. So then, we see here that these events in this first advent of Jesus and also in his birth hold true for us as we enter 2020.

There is a progression in history. And it's all in God's hands.

[ 13 : 25 ] We seem very far removed from the coming of Jesus 2,000 odd years ago. But God is still at work.

He still rules the world. He still governs all things. And although we can become very dispirited and discouraged by what we find about the situation in the Church in this country, we should also be encouraged to know that there are now more Christians in the world than there have ever been. God is at work. The Church is growing and expanding. And we were praying for North Korea. But I understand that the Church is growing there too, despite persecution and opposition. So God is still at work. The Gospel is still prevailing. But we need to recover it in our own country. What happened for the birth of Jesus and at this time after his birth is a microcosm of the whole of the Gospel age, the Christian age, which we're in.

[ 15 : 00 ] And it reveals the principles that continue now. God is sovereign. And we read from Micah chapter 5, and we see how that was fulfilled.

Jesus came, and it's the prophecy that we didn't read, in verse 6 of chapter 2, that Bethlehem was the place where Jesus would be born.

An insignificant little place, still quite small. There's thousands of other towns that you might have thought would have been more important.

But it's Bethlehem to which he came. And you could easily pass it by. But this is where God said he would come.

This is where he came. Now, there are those who would have us believe that it wasn't Bethlehem in Judea, but Bethlehem in Zebulun, in the north.

[ 16 : 04 ] Perhaps more significant a place. But Matthew and Micah are quite clear that it's Bethlehem in Judea.

It's where David was born. And where David, King David, came from. And that's not an accident. Because this ruler, as we read, will be a shepherd to his people.

Just like David was a shepherd, both literally and to the people as king. So Jesus, as David's greater son, as the king who sits on the throne of David and shall sit on it forever, is a shepherd for the people who are Christians, you and I, if we belong to Christ.

David was insignificant when he started. You remember the story, how Samuel went to look for the king to replace, for a king to replace Saul, who was a disaster.

Went to all the sons of Jesse. No, says the Lord, none of these. Are there any others? Oh yeah, there's David out looking after the sheep.

[ 17 : 28 ] Can't be him. But he was the one. He was the one. Insignificant. Here, this little baby, born in a stable, laid in a manger, having to run for it and flee to Egypt.

How could he be the king of Israel? But he is. And God planned it all along and brought it to pass. Herod tried to stop it. He tried to eliminate the Messiah. He knew who this king was, that it was the Messiah. But he deliberately set himself to destroy him.

But no, God had it in his hand. And rescues him. And so we see that in Hosea 11.1, When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

Of course, the Jewish thought would be to Israel coming out of Egypt. At the Exodus. And Israel was the son. But no, the prophecy is referring to one who is the son of God.

[ 18 : 52 ] Jesus. And it's his almost incidental flight to Egypt and coming back out of Egypt. That we see that God has planned this all along.

He's fulfilled what he has promised and what he has said. And then in Jeremiah 31.15, we have this reference to the voice of weeping in Rama of the women and mothers, refusing to be comforted for their children because they were no more.

God said this would happen. This is what Satan is trying to do. To destroy the son of God.

And then we come fourthly to this rather obscure reference to the fact that Jesus is called a Nazarene. Notice it's not a Nazirite.

A Nazirite was someone different. Samson was a Nazirite. Someone who was set apart for God, perhaps for season, though Samson for life.

[ 20 : 08 ] And they wouldn't drink wine. And in Samson's case, his hair wasn't cut. But Jesus is a Nazarene.

And indicative that he was coming from Nazareth. And you remember that later on in Jesus' ministry, the Pharisees couldn't understand.

They said, Jesus can't be the Christ because he comes from Nazareth. And they didn't know the story of his birth, being born in Bethlehem.

They thought he was a Nazarene. That's what he became called and known as. But that's not where he began his life.

He was born in Bethlehem. But quite which prophecies Matthew's referring to isn't clear.

[ 21 : 06 ] We don't know. Perhaps it comes from the name of Nazareth, which means a shoot or a branch. And that's the expression.

But somehow and in some way, God has indicated that Jesus is a Nazarene.

Or called that. And this is part of the fulfillment of Scripture. Matthew then introduces these statements as having been spoken, or this statement rather, having been spoken by the prophets.

And he may be indicating it's a general truth, a general term that is true of Jesus. Now, it appears all along that Joseph and Mary followed what God said without being conscious that they were fulfilling Scripture, fulfilling the prophecies.

And that will lead us into something else in a moment. But we need to realize that we don't know what God has for us in 2020.

[ 22 : 46 ] It's not written in the Bible, in any detail at least, or in any reference to 2020 at all. But this we know, that God is sovereign.

And that what comes to pass is in his hand. And nothing will happen that he's lost control of.

Events are happening very fast here. The love of many for God is growing cold.

Go from worse to worse. Knowledge is increasing through the internet and through other means, but the knowledge of the Lord is in decline.

We don't know how to behave anymore. We're flouting God's rule and we're disintegrating. People love only money and themselves.

[ 24 : 06 ] It's a philosophy abroad. It's me that matters. No one else. People are boastful and grow proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, are ungrateful.

They consider nothing sacred. They're unloving and unforgiving. They slander others. They have no self-control. They're cruel and hate what's good.

They betray their friends, are reckless, puffed up with pride, love pleasure rather than God. They act religiously, spirituality, but they reject the power that could make them godly.

Well, that's, of course, quoting or a paraphrase of Paul writing to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 3. And of such, he says, stay away from them.

They're all around us. We're being pumped, this kind of philosophy, from all around. We need to stay clear of it.

[ 25 : 14 ] Otherwise, it'll lead us astray. We are to understand and to know that God is the law.

Well, then, we need to also see and understand that we are protected in our submission to God.

And that's what I was referring to just now when I said that Mary and Joseph didn't know what was happening in the detail. They didn't seem to realize that they were fulfilling prophecies of Scripture.

But what they were is that they were obedient, especially Joseph. And he submits to God. He's told in a dream, get up and go, take the child and his mother and go to Egypt.

And we touched on that last time, the difficulties of going to Egypt with nothing, no place to stay, no certainty about the future, and yet a submission to God.

God has said, we'll do it, without realizing, perhaps, the full significance of it. God. And the question that it raises for us is, are we so submissive to God?

[ 26 : 43 ] Will we be submissive to him in the new year? That we may not understand what he wants and what he's calling us to do, but we'll do it because we trust him, because we know that all is in his hands.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. It could have all gone so wrong in Matthew chapter 2.

It could have been a total disaster. Supposing Joseph had said, no, I'm not going to go to Egypt. That's stupid. That's folly.

It could have been disastrous. But he submits. And he's protected by it as he submits to the Lord and to the Lord's messenger.

He's an obedient servant of God. Well, we don't any longer obey dreams, but the revelation of the scriptures of the Old and New Testament.

[ 27 : 53 ] And even though we may not always know why God has issued certain commands and certain precepts and statutes for us, yet nevertheless, we submit because it comes from the Lord

and we want to do his will.

And that's our frame of mind as we were looking at this morning. That's our attitude to do the will of God. Joseph does the will of God.

When Joseph awoke from his dream and knew that Mary was expecting the child in the first place, as we're told earlier, and Luke tells us, that he hurried off to Mary's house and they were shortly married.

And that's what the Lord told him to do and he submitted. He couldn't understand it. Why? How's Mary pregnant?

What's happening? Why is God saying, marry her? But of course, in his doing so, he offered Mary protection as her husband and he gave Jesus the dignity of a foster father.

[ 29 : 25 ] Joseph was obedient and submitted to God. And we are to be submitting to God in the same way.

And then, finally, there's a protection by implication here, by action of faith. We've said that Joseph submitted, but he didn't sit around theorizing about it and trying to work out why and what and wherefore.

He just did it. He heard the word of God and he obeyed it. And that should be key to us in 2020, that we are the doers of God's word.

We're not just theoretical Christians, if you like. We don't just come to church and hear the word and we say, well, that's very interesting or I don't agree with that or in some way we theorize about the word, but we don't do anything about it.

We are to be men and women of action, acting in faith and submissive but doing. Joseph takes Mary and Jesus to Egypt.

[ 30 : 55 ] He submits, he does, he acts. When he's told it's clear to come back, he comes back. He submits and he obeys.

he realizes and puts into practice the fact that God is sovereign and he does God's will.

These Christmas stories are not children's stories. they're adult stories for adult Christians.

Their purpose recorded by the authors of the gospel under God is so that we might learn, so that we might learn from the example of Joseph that we may be obedient to God, that in the chaos and danger and violence of our world.

We know that we're under God's protection and so we submit to him and we're active in our submission.

[ 32 : 14 ] Listen, finally, to how the Message Bible puts what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 3, the Sermon on the Mount.

He says, you're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule. you're blessed when you feel you're lost what is most dear to you.

Only then can you be embraced by the one most dear to you. You're blessed when you're content with just who you are.

No more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought. You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God.

He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat. You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being careful you find yourself cared for.

[ 33 : 29 ] You're blessed when you get your inside world, your mind and heart put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are and your place in God's family.

You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom. Not only that, count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit you.

What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they're uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens.

Give a cheer even. For though they don't like it, God says, I do. And all heaven applause.

[ 34 : 41 ] May God grant to us then that in 2020 as we come to this new year that we're in submission to the sovereign Lord and we're active for him in our everyday lives.

Not just on a Sunday, on the Lord's day, but every day. That every day is the Lord's day for us because we're walking with him.

we're obedient to him and we trust him so that we can say welcome 2020. Welcome whatever you bring.  
We're in him. Secure. Let us pray.