

Christmas Day talk

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Preacher: Andy Meadows

[0 : 0 0] And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they refilled great fear.

And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. Well, happy Christmas to you all. My name is Andy Meadows. I'm a youth and children's worker here at Grace Church.

It's great to see so many people. I'm very excited. You're very excited. It's finally here, Christmas Day. And we're going to spend a few minutes now thinking about the Christmas story.

But first, in my little bowl, I've got some pieces of news. And you need to imagine that these happen today on Christmas Day.

[1 : 0 3] And you need to decide whether these are good news, thumbs up, bad news, thumbs down, or irrelevant news. It doesn't affect you in the middle.

So, a volunteer to pull one out of the hat. Go on, George. That one. Okay, this one. Someone brings out Monopoly for afternoon entertainment.

Is that good news, bad news, or irrelevant news? Okay, okay. Interesting. Interesting. A fair amount of good news there.

Okay, well, let's do a few more. Would you like to pull one out? There we go. Oh, the Wi-Fi breaks and your phone runs out of data.

Oh, it doesn't even bear thinking about, does it? It doesn't even bear thinking about. Oh, dear. Oh, dear. Bad news. I think it was more of a generational thing, that one. Okay.

[2 : 0 5] Go on, Nathaniel. You pull one out. This one. Okay. Everything stops at three o'clock to watch the Queen. Now, this might separate people.

Good news, bad news, irrelevant news. Interesting. Interesting. Double thumbs up from some people. Massive royalists. Okay.

Last one. Go on, Roy. Pull that one out. Last one. Okay, this one then. Oh, the chef has forgotten to cook the Brussels sprouts.

Is that good news? Bad news? Or irrelevant news? Oh, some people like sprouts. Okay. Okay. Interesting. Interesting.

Well, there's lots of different reactions there. But here's the last one. You don't have to put your thumbs up for this one. The birth of Jesus. Is that good news? Is it bad news?

[3 : 0 1] Or is it irrelevant news? Well, our first reading gives us the answer. So have a look down again. Have a look down at the little number 10.

Because the angel said to them, that's the shepherds watching their sheep, do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

The angel announces the birth of Jesus and to some shepherds as good news. But not just good news for them. Good news for the whole world.

Good news for the whole world. So if you happen to live anywhere in the world, then the birth of Jesus is not bad news. It's not irrelevant news.

It's good news for you. But why? Did you know 250 babies are born every minute around the world? So by the time we're here this morning, roughly 15,000 babies will be born during our service.

[4 : 07] So what's so special about this baby? Born in the other side of the world nearly 2,000 years ago. Well again, the angel tells us.

Because here's the big thing. Jesus has come as a rescuer. Jesus has come as a rescuer. Have a look down at the little number 11 that was read.

Today in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. Jesus has come to be a saviour.

That just means a rescuer. We know what a rescuer does, don't we? They save people from danger. And we all know that we have different rescuers to fit the different dangers.

So time for another bit of audience participation, a quick quiz. Who would you want to come rescue you? You need to stand up for the first option and stay sitting down for the second option.

[5 : 05] So, first one. You get into trouble in a swimming pool. Would you like a lifeguard or a security guard? To stand up for lifeguard, sit down for security guard.

Okay. Good. People are playing along. Fantastic. Great. Sit down. Lovely. Second one.

You're trapped in a burning building. Who would you want to come rescue you? A fireman or a postman? Okay. Stand up for firemen. Stay sitting down for a postman.

Some people have got a lot of faith in royal mail here. I'm not sure I'm with you, but thank you very much. Now, this is just a preference one. You're in trouble at sea. Would you rather have a lifeboat rescue you or a helicopter?

So, lifeboat, stand up. Helicopter, sit down. That's more of a preference one. Lots of helicopters. Yeah, I'm with you. I'm totally with you. I'm totally with you. All about the helicopter. Well, in Jesus, the angel says we have a rescuer, a saviour.

[6 : 08] Not from a swimming pool or a fire, but still the very real danger of sin. You see, sin is the Bible's way of describing how we all push God out of our lives and we live with ourselves in charge.

This heart attitude is the deep problem of the world. It explains every negative news story of 2019, of which there have been a lot. It's why 2019 is not just quite bumpy for the royal family, but for all of us.

And it puts us in danger with God. But the good news that the angel gives us is that Jesus was born to rescue. And Luke gives us the rest of the story.

Jesus grew up. He loved us so much that he sacrificed himself on the cross to take our sin on himself. And so when we put our trust in his death for us, our emergency problem is dealt with.

Our rescue is complete. Okay, as we close part one, imagine you get home from school or work and you see an ambulance, a bit bigger than this one, outside your house with the flashing lights and everything.

[7 : 24] What do you think? Well, you could think, oh, those ambulance lights are pretty. Let's just turn off all the lights and look at those lights. They'll be fantastic. You could even comment on the parking or the tyre pressure.

But if you did those things, you'd miss the main thing, wouldn't you? It's not a friend's car outside your house. It's not even a doctor's car. It's an ambulance.

A rescue is taking place. Well, Christmas is good news for lots of reasons. There's so much to enjoy today. Fun, food and family. But amongst all the excitement, the angel announcement to the shepherds shows us not to miss the main thing, what's going on.

Like the call out of an ambulance, the birth of Jesus is an emergency world rescue. It's our emergency rescue. This is God's presence to the world, to each one of us here this morning.

And it's why Jesus' birth is not bad news. It's not irrelevant news. It's good news for the whole world. Well, how do the shepherds react?

[8 : 39] How do the angels react? Well, we're going to read on and find out. And Valerie's going to come and give us our second reading. Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. 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 to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Part two. I need three volunteers to open a present. Okay. Rory. And Rachel.

[10 : 04] And Marosh. Up you come then. Now, Rory, that's your one.

That's your one and that's your one. Let's move closer. And you're going to open them in a minute. And then afterwards, you're all going to say, Thanks very much.

It's just what I wanted. Okay. Right. Off you go then. Open them up. See what you got. Who's got what? What have you got, Marosh?

You've got a chocolate orange. Rachel, what have you got? Chocolate orange. Rory, what have you got? An onion. Okay, great. Now, after three. One, two, three. It's just what I wanted.

It's just what I wanted. You're a very, very good actor, Rory. Very good actor. Great. Thank you very much. Now, you can keep that. That's yours to keep. Fantastic. Sit down.

[11 : 01] No, don't be silly. I've got you one as well. Don't worry. Don't worry. You can share it later. Fantastic. Now, our response to opening a present, it has a lot to do with the present itself, doesn't it?

The same with news that we hear. Earlier, we thought about Jesus born as a rescuer. It's God's present. He is God's present to our world. And so, how should we respond to this present, this good news?

Well, we can learn a lot from the angels. Have a look down in verse 13 from our second reading. Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth, peace to those on whom his favour rests.

The angels reacted to Jesus' birth by praising God. Why? Because Jesus brings peace. Did you spot that? On earth, peace to those on whom his favour rests.

Now, peace is what we all want on Christmas Day, I guess, especially if you've been up for about six hours already. But the angels are not talking about a peace and quiet with a nice cup of tea and a mince pot.

[12 : 25] They're talking about peace between us and God. An end to hostility. A restored relationship. Now, you've probably heard of the Christmas truce during World War I.

On Christmas Eve and Christmas Day in 1914, soldiers from both sides walked into no man's land. They exchanged presents. They sung carols and even played football.

Germany won on penalties, I think. But on Christmas Day was soon over. And the fighting began again. You see, the Christmas truce didn't last long.

But the Christmas truce with God that Jesus brings doesn't just last for Christmas Day, but for all eternity. It will never end.

Because through trusting in the rescue of Jesus' death for us, our sin is painful. And we are declared friends with God again. Did you spot how the shepherds responded in a similar way?

[13 : 35] Have a look down at verse 16, the little 16. So they, that's the shepherds, hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger.

And then, verse 20, the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The angels praised God. The shepherds praised God. Why? Because of this special baby who had been born.

A rescuer who brings everlasting peace with God. Think back to your last school trip.

Some might have to think back further than others. But where did you go? How would you describe it afterwards? In June 2018, some boys went on a school trip.

[14 : 36] They described it afterwards as life-changing. They cried tears of joy and relief when they got home. And their teacher thanked people all over the world.

Now that's not a normal reaction to a school trip. It's definitely not a reaction I've ever had when I went to Wales or somewhere like that. Parents would ask me how the trip was.

And I'd say, it's all right. Standard teenage boy. But why then did these teenage boys react this way? Why were they filled with overwhelming joy and relief and thanking people over the world?

Well, perhaps you know where I'm going. Because on their school trip, they were trapped for 18 days in a cave in Thailand. They went diving.

Something went wrong and they got stuck in a cave. Perhaps you remember the story. Divers from all over the world mobilized. And they got there. And after 18 days, all 12 of the boys and their coach were rescued.

[15 : 40] They reacted with overwhelming joy and relief and praise because of that rescue. Well, in a similar way, our response to the rescue that Jesus brings is to praise God with overwhelming joy and relief that like the shepherds and angels in our passage.

Because this rescue as well brings life-changing, eternity-changing peace with God. As we close then, for those of us who wouldn't call ourselves followers of Jesus, well, then we can still have a reaction like the shepherds in our story.

Because have a look, verse 15, what did they do? Well, they first went to Bethlehem to investigate the claims made about Jesus. Now, we don't have to do that today.

But we can still investigate Jesus for ourselves. And we'll think about later how we might go about doing that. But for those of us who would call ourselves followers of Jesus, Christmas can be stressful.

For some, it's a deeply painful time of year. Well, in the mixture of reactions and emotions, we can still have that deep joy, relief, and praise to God.

[17 : 08] Because in Jesus, we have been rescued to everlasting peace with him. What good news of great joy for the whole world to give thanks for this Christmas.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the good news of great joy for the whole world of the birth of a saviour.

We thank you for the rescue that Jesus brings. And we pray, Father, that amongst all the excitement of today, you would help us remember the big thing and react with overwhelming joy, relief, and praise to you.

Amen. Amen. Amen.