

A greater purpose

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[0 : 00] I was reading recently a survey and it said that the average British woman spends 300 hours preparing for Christmas. So about one and a half down, only 298.5 to go.

Incidentally, that survey said that the average British man starts his preparations for Christmas at 5pm on Christmas Eve. So a bit of a difference there.

I don't know about you though, but in the run up to Christmas, I often look at my diary and don't know how I'm going to fit it all in. Christmas is busy, isn't it? And it can sometimes be so busy that it can be really easy to forget what it is that we're actually celebrating, that little baby in a manger. So as Fiona said, we're just going to spend a few minutes now having a look at what the Bible says happened that first Christmas. So if you want to grab the little booklets that you have, this is an eyewitness account of one of the eyewitness accounts in the Bible of Jesus' life.

And if you can turn to page four, you'll see at the top it says the birth of Jesus in bold. And we're going to read from that paragraph. We're not going to start right at the top. And we're going to start part of the way down at the little 21 over on the right hand side.

[1 : 19] So listen with me as I read. So unlike the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge who kept the world waiting for a whole week back in April, before they announced the name of their baby, this baby's names are announced way before his birth.

And it's this baby's names that we're going to just spend a few minutes now thinking about, because these names have specific meanings. Now, my name, Patasha, is made up. So my name has no official meaning whatsoever.

But lots of names do, don't they? So Fiona, our host this evening, apparently your name means fair or white. And my eldest boy is called Rory and his name means red-haired king.

Now, he is neither red-haired nor is king. So as you can see, some people think a little bit more about the meaning of names than others. But here, the meaning of the two names given to this baby are designed to be very important, because they tell us why that baby came into the world that first Christmas.

And the first name that we see down here tells us this, that Jesus came to rescue. Jesus came to rescue. Have a look down with me again at that little 21.

[2 : 57] She, Mary, will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. The baby will be called Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

Jesus came to perform a rescue. That little baby came to save, to rescue. I wonder if we've ever thought about Christmas like that. The school nativity paints that heartwarming story, doesn't it, of the happy homeless couple who welcome their firstborn amongst all the cuddly animals in the stable.

There are no flashing blue lights or sirens. But actually, that may have been more appropriate, because this baby came to rescue. And if we need rescuing, it begs the question what we need rescuing from, doesn't it?

And this verse in the Bible tells us that the rescue is from sin. Now, sin is a word that we don't really use in everyday speech, isn't it? We might talk about our guilty pleasures of binge-watching our favourite series on Netflix, or of our expensive handbag helmet.

But that's not what the Bible means here. When the Bible talks of sin, just as we'll go home this evening, and after hanging our wreath on the door, we'll shut the door, the Bible says that we all, by nature, have shut the door to God.

[4 : 22] And that's what the Bible calls sin. It's a failure to acknowledge God's rule and the good things that he gives us.

And we see the results of that all around us, don't we? Possibly, most acutely, at Christmas time. We all struggle to live God's way in his world. Even if it's not quite as obvious as the ungrateful child who throws a tantrum on Christmas morning because they've not got the right presents.

Or the two family members that can't bear to be in the same room as each other. Let me ask you a question. So when a friend posts that picture on Facebook or Instagram, what's our first thought? Is it one of comparison to see how we fare against that picture? Or if we're actually in that picture, where does our eye go first?

Is it not to us? And then we deem that photo a good or bad photo, depending on how we look. We're not quite as bad as that tantrum showing throwing child, and we hide it a lot better.

[5 : 29] But it's not actually that much different, is it? Imagine if our Instagram grid was full of photos that we would least like, the photos of the points in our life that we would least like people to see.

I know I would delete my account immediately. Well, the Bible's claim is that God sees our most Instagram unworthy photos. He sees that we're not good, that we don't serve his presence, his blessings.

But God loves us too much to leave things that way. And the great news is that that very first Christmas, he sent Jesus into the world to provide a way back into relationship with him.

You know how Father Christmas always asks children if they've been good before he gives them a present? Well, with Jesus, it was the exact opposite. He knows that none of us have been good enough for him.

He knows that none of us deserve his good gifts. And that is why Jesus died on the cross, to take the punishment that we deserve at shutting the door to God, so that we can be forgiven and have a relationship with God.

[6 : 41] So we've looked at the first name that's given to the baby down here in this passage, and I hope we've seen that Jesus came into the world that first Christmas to rescue us. Jesus came to rescue us.

And now we're going to see from the other name given to the baby, that Jesus also came to reveal God to us. So secondly, Jesus came to reveal God to us.

And have a look back down at that passage, at the little 22. All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

So seven, eight hundred years before this event took place, the prophet Isaiah had told God's people that one day God would give them a sign that he was about to act.

And that sign would be this baby. God doesn't want us to miss it. He doesn't want us to miss what's going on that first Christmas. I don't know if you've ever missed something that's right before your eyes.

[7 : 47] My boys love watching this YouTube clip at the moment. It's of Cristiano Ronaldo. He dons a bit of a disguise. He's looking quite dishevelled.

And he goes out into a square in Madrid and starts doing keepy-uppy used football tricks. And people just ignore him. They just walk on by, even though he's obviously pretty good. And it can be a bit like that with us, can't it?

We're so busy at Christmas time. We celebrate Christmas every year, but we don't really stop and think what it is or who it is that we're actually celebrating. Like those people in the square in Madrid, we miss what's happening right before our eyes.

We miss who it is. In that square in Madrid, Ronaldo, after he had been playing for about two hours, this little boy, maybe about eight years old, comes and joins him and they have a bit of a kickabout. And eventually, Ronaldo picks up the ball, signs it, gives it to the little boy, and takes off his disguise. His identity is revealed. And all of a sudden, crowds of people swarm around him.

[8 : 53] Cristiano Ronaldo, arguably one of the greatest footballers of all time, has been in their midst and they didn't even notice. He is right before their eyes. Now, Joseph, who this actual chunk is being spoken to, and the first readers of Matthew's eyewitness account, would have no doubt known that prophecy back in Isaiah.

And here it is, being fulfilled right before their eyes. The baby Jesus' identity is revealed. He is Emmanuel, which means God with us. Jesus came to reveal God to us.

So God is not disinterested. He cares about his people deeply, so deeply that he came to earth that first Christmas in the person of Jesus, to dwell with them, to rescue them.

We may have heard people say, or we may have even said it ourselves, that I think God is like this.

Well, we don't need to do that. And God has revealed himself to us in the person of Jesus.

Jesus came to reveal God to us. Growing up, my sister would always try and guess what the presents were under the tree. So she'd give him a good feel and a bit of a shake.

[10:08] And she'd proclaim something like, oh, it's Lego, and I might join in and say, no, no, no, it's a jigsaw. And finally, on Christmas morning, one or more of us would be proved wrong.

Well, it doesn't have to be like that with God. There is no guessing game. The Bible's claim is that if we want to know what God is like, we just have to look at Jesus.

And if you were to read on, if we were to read on in Matthew's Gospel, and please do take these away with you and do just that, if you'd like to, we'll see that this baby is no ordinary baby.

Jesus' life, his character, his teachings, his miracles, his death, his resurrection, all show his divinity. With the birth of each of our children, we've been given those baby journals.

You know, the ones where you record babies firsts, first smile, first steps, first day at school. What can you imagine what Mary's baby journal for Jesus must have been like?

[11:08] Alongside all those other common firsts, first calming of the storm, first teaching to crowds of thousands, first healing miracle, first prediction of his own death, first claim that he's divine.

Everything about Jesus' life, his death, his resurrection, not only tell of his divinity, but also show us what God is like. Compassionate, beyond wisdom, all-powerful, trustworthy, just, merciful.

Jesus came to reveal God to us. And if the Bible's claim is true, then that has huge significance, doesn't it?

If Jesus was just a good teacher, or some crap pot claiming to be God, then we can take or leave him. We can take him or leave him. But if Jesus is God, as the Bible claims he is, and as he claims he is, then surely we need to take him seriously and listen to what he says.

So we've seen that Jesus' names tell us two things about who he is and why he came. Jesus came that first Christmas to rescue us, and Jesus came that first Christmas to reveal God to us.

[12:25] Amen.