

Christingle Service (4pm)

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Date: 24 December 2010

Preacher: Mark Fossey

[0 : 0 0] Our second reading is from Matthew's Gospel, 1st chapter, verses 18 to 25. Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.

When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. 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 Immanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

[1 : 2 0] He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus. Well, let me add my welcome.

It occurred to me, so I was sitting there thinking, how many weeks have we been picking up? You know, it's five shopping days to Christmas, 20 shopping days, and it's finally here. It's Christmas Day. How exciting. And I've seen quite a lot of toys already this morning.

Some of them very colourful, some of them very loud. I do find James Widow and his ties, as you've got musical ties, very exciting. Now, this morning...

Oh, you can hear it there. Very good. This morning, I wanted to start off our talk. We're going to do our talk in two parts, and I thought we'd start off with a game. Games are always crowd-pleasers for talks, I find.

But before we even start our game, I want to show you a picture, if the technology will allow it. There we go. I don't know if you can see that. That is a pretty dark picture, that. That is a picture of my beautiful wife.

[2 : 2 2] Now, I don't know if you can see there. You might not be able to see, but there's something very funny about her. She's very beautiful, but there's something slightly funny. Can anyone see what's funny about her?

It is you, that's right. Can anyone see... I don't know if anyone can see that. Can anyone see what's funny about her, one of the children? She's got a big tummy. Very well spotted.

This is actually a picture of her just after Christmas dinner last year. No, it isn't really, of course. I'm joking. What's in her belly?

Anyone got a guess? A baby. Well done. She's got a baby in her belly. So what I thought we'd start off this morning with a game is it's a baby boy. We're very excited.

We were born in March, and we need to come up with a name for our baby. So I wondered if I could get you guys to help us out. Which is very exciting, isn't it? Because, you see, on Christmas Day, you open presents, which is very exciting.

[3 : 18] But presents, they only last a few months, don't they? Maybe a few years. But a baby's name, well, goes on for the whole of his life. So this is very important. Let's see if we can come up with a name. Here's some suggestions that I came up with earlier.

We've narrowed them down to these names. I'll just read them out. Judas, Cameron, Paul, Algernon, Lucifer, and Calvin.

Those are, that's basically our short list at the moment. So what I'd like you to do is just have a think for a minute. Just for a minute. Which one would you vote for? And I'm going to get you to put your hands up, and we're going to vote for which one we think is the best one, okay?

So I'll just say those names again. Judas, Cameron, Paul, Algernon, Lucifer, and Calvin. And I've got a particular favourite. I'll let you know in a minute. Right, so you've got one vote, only one vote, and you put your hand up nice and high.

So, whoever wants to vote for Judas, put your hands up. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Okay, just two, that's good. Cameron, hands up. Paul, here's a splattering Cameron.

[4 : 20] Okay, hands down. What about Paul? Hands up. Oh, popular name that. Hands down. Thank you. What about Algernon? Yeah. Very good. Yeah, I think that's a slight second place, actually.

Hands down. Lucifer? Oh. Yeah, that's right. Thank you very much. Hands down. And Calvin. What about Calvin? Well, I think, thank you.

Hands down. I think Paul won it, and I'm very pleased that Algernon was the second place, because I'll show you why. You see, the thing is, when we choose a name like what we just did there, we choose a name based on how it sounds, or people we associate with that name.

But actually, maybe you didn't know this, but all people's names have a meaning. They all mean something. So let me just show you what these names mean, which is very interesting. The first one is Judas.

That means praised. So that would be quite a good name, really. The second one is Cameron. And that means crooked nose. It's quite good, that one, isn't it?

[5 : 21] The next one is Paul, which was our favourite. So this is what we'd name him, if I was to take your advice. It means small. Not that great, is it? Calvin.

It means bald. Lucifer. Lucifer. It means bringer of light. I think that sounds quite positive, personally. And my favourite, I think my favourite at the moment is Algernon, which means with a moustache.

Great name, great name. This morning, we're going to think about the names of Jesus. Now, Jesus had lots of different names. The Lion of Judah.

The Key of David. David. And we're going to look at two of his names, particularly today. And in Jewish thinking, when they named a child, the name meant something.

So it wasn't just, oh, I like the sound of that name, Jesus, that suits. It means something. And it's interesting, in the reading we just had read, which you have on your service sheet there, did you notice, who decided the name of Jesus?

[6 : 24] It wasn't Mary and Joseph. It was the angel. It was God. Because Jesus is the son of God. And God named him what he named him. We're going to look at two names this morning.

We're going to do it in two parts. We're going to have a song in between. And so here's the first name of Jesus, which means something, which tells us something about this baby born in a manger. And there's the first name, Emmanuel, which means God with us.

If you've got your service sheet there, have a look at verse 23. Well, let me read from verse 22. All these took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel. Now, Jesus' name wasn't Emmanuel, but in the sense that Emmanuel, which means God with us, that was Jesus' name in a sense, because Jesus was God with us.

I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but when you think about all the different religions in the world, none of them believe that their major founder was God.

[7 : 32] I mean, that's an extraordinary thing to say. The Muslims would never, ever say Muhammad is God. The Buddhists would never say Buddha was God. But Christians say that Jesus is God.

It's an extraordinary thing to say. And the reason we say Jesus is God, well, let me give you three reasons. Firstly, Jesus said he was God. So he said he would judge like God.

He said he'd forgive sins like God. He said he claimed to be one with God, or he spoke the very words of God. He even said he'd come from heaven and seen what God does.

Jesus said he was God. He proved it how he lived. He lived an absolutely lovely, lovely life. Do you know that even Jesus' mother and brothers thought that he never did anything wrong in his whole life morally?

Isn't that extraordinary? So he might well be God because of his moral life. But thirdly, he proved it by what he did. He did absolutely amazing miracles. I wonder if you can remember some of the miracles that Jesus did that showed he was God.

[8 : 37] He healed every disease and sickness. He turned the people who were so mentally insane they were absolutely out of control just sane in a word like that.

He brought himself back from the dead. I've never met anyone that can do that. Jesus showed he was God by what he did and what he said. But Jesus wasn't only God.

He was God with us. He was Emmanuel. God with us. God with us. Which is amazing when you think about it. Let me put it this way. This is something my wife put me onto this week when she was thinking about this with me.

If you were God, if you were God, would you leave the splendour and the joy and the perfection of heaven, the suffering-free, wonderful existence of heaven and come down to earth in our suffering and miserable existence we have on earth?

Would you do that? My wife put it like this. She said it would be a bit like us in our comfortable, warm, happy houses deciding one day, I know what I'll do. I'll go and live in the sewers with a rat.

[9 : 48] Who would want to do that? That's disgusting. And yet that's what Jesus did when he left heaven and came to live on earth. He came to live amongst the rats, really.

And do you know what? When Jesus was born, he was born like he was born in a sewer. He was born in a manger. I wonder who knows what a manger is.

Does anyone know what a manger is? Any ideas? Go on. That's exactly right. I'll show you a picture of a modern-day manger. Do you know what that is?

That's a dog bowl. That's where doggies eat their food out of. We used to have a doggy when I was little. And when you went into the kitchen, there was always this pungent smell from one corner and it was the dog's bowl because invariably it was half-eaten dry food like this that had been there for a day or two.

And it stank horribly. When Jesus came from heaven to earth, do you know they laid him in a manger in the Palestinian equivalent of a dog's feeding dish.

[10 : 55] I tell you what, when my boy was born, that is not the first place I'm thinking of putting him when he's born. But that's where Jesus was laid. He left the splendour of heaven to be God with us, to be born in a manger, to live on the earth.

In fact, it's even more amazing than that when you think about it. He wasn't just a man who left the splendour of his home to live in the sewer of rats. He became a rat to live with a rat.

This is a God who wants to know us. Now why would God do that? Because when Jesus became a man, we could understand God in human terms.

What is God like? For most people, God is so far away. He's so distant. How could you ever know God or understand God? But 2,000 years ago, God stepped into our planet, in our earth, and became a man so that you could look at him and you could understand, oh, that's what God's like.

He became one of us. He became God with us, Emmanuel, so that we could understand God on our own terms. God condescended himself so that we could understand him.

[12 : 09] And that is a great God. Do you know what? Before we go on to the second name, the first name there is Emmanuel, God with us. Before we go on to the second name, we're going to sing another song.

We're going to sing this song, See Him Lying on a Bed of Straw. And this is a song about the Lord Jesus, who was God with us, who was born amongst straw in a manger.

You might have spotted I've got a bit of a cold, which I'm noticing, I can really sing proper baritone notes, you know, Oh, the Israelites. I can really get down there. Good.

Well, this, the first name that we looked at, the name of Jesus, was Emmanuel, God with us. And this is the second name we're going to look at. The name Jesus, which was his name, of course.

And that means God saves. So if you take your service sheet up again and have a look at the reading we had just a moment ago, let me read verse 21.

[13 : 11] She, that's Mary, will bear a son. And you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Jesus means God saves. And he saves his people from their sins. Well, let me ask you a question before I even think about those things.

If you were God, would that have been the reason that you'd come to earth? I mean, why would God want to come to earth? What would he achieve if he came to earth? Imagine if you went and met some people that were a lot less good at something than you are.

What would you like to do when you went to be with them? What would you like to show? Maybe God would want to come to earth to show his authority and his power.

Maybe I might do that if I was God. I mean, Jesus did do amazing, powerful things. He did great miracles that no one else in their right mind would ever claim to do.

[14 : 08] He healed every disease just by speaking. You know, AIDS, cancer. He just spoke a word and it was instantly healed. Amazing. He controlled the weather.

He could just say stop to a rain cloud and it would stop. He could say start and it could just snow. He could speak to weather and control it. He could make food appear out of nothing.

He once, or more than once actually, fed 5,000 people with nothing, with just a few loaves of bread. He could make food appear. He did amazing miracles.

He even raised people from the dead by just saying a word. Get up. And dead people would get up. He had extraordinary power. But no, that's not the answer.

That's not why God came to be with us. That's not the first and foremost reason. Well, what about this? Maybe God would come to the world to make it a better place. I mean, if you were God, would you do that?

[15 : 03] You'd come to the world to make it a better place. And in one sense he did. He healed sick people. He raised dead people. He founded a church of people who love each other as brothers and do lots of good things around the world.

That definitely makes the world a better place. But making the world a better place wasn't the first and foremost reason that God came to earth. Or maybe it was to teach wisdom and show us how to live.

Morals. And he definitely did that. And in his day, everyone was amazed at his teaching and still today it's extraordinary how a bloke who frankly was a carpenter, he was a first century equivalent of someone who worked at B&Q;,, okay, he still talked about and his morals still affect the way whole societies live today.

I mean, that's extraordinary, isn't it? But even that, even his teaching, his morals, wasn't the first and foremost reason that God came to be with us, Emmanuel. the first and foremost reason that God became a person, a human being, the clue's in his name, Jesus.

God saves. The reason God became a human being was to save his people from their sins. It's very striking to me when I was thinking about this this week that when God came to live in the sewer, to live as a rat amongst rats, the reason he did it was to save the rat.

[16 : 33] He could easily have looked at us and thought, look at that lot, they're just like rats, what do they do for me? What do they care for me? But he didn't, he came to save us. That's extraordinary for a God.

Many gods don't care. They're distant, they're unknowing. The reason we need saving is because God is a God of justice and I think justice is a very good thing.

All the wrong things that are done against you, all the terrible things that have been done against other people will be righted on the last day. God says he will judge all people.

All the people like Adolf Hitler and Pol Pot and all the really wicked people will get justice on the last day and that is a great thing. That's part of what makes God a really good God.

But the problem is, well the problem is us because we've done wrong things against other people. We've said and thought and done things which hurt people.

[17 : 32] We've lied, we've cheated, we've said bad things about other people. We know in our hearts that we've done wrong things. Some of us, many of us, have got skeletons in our closet.

Some of us have got more than others. We know there are things that we've done wrong that possibly no other person knows, but God knows. And God will want justice for all of those things too.

So we do need to be saved. We need to be saved from the big list of things that we've done wrong and we know we've done wrong. But you see, the baby that was born in a manger, Jesus, God saves.

He will save His people from their sins. Let me illustrate how this works with a story about a friend of mine. There's a friend of mine I used to know whose dad had an amazing day one time.

In 1988, so many years ago, this man, my friend's dad, used to get up every morning at exactly the same time. His alarm clock would always go off at exactly the same time.

[18 : 33] He'd get up, he'd have his breakfast, he'd put his clothes on, he'd go down to the train station and it's very funny, if you ever get the train in the morning where commuters get the train, what happens on train platforms is people stand in funny little bunches all the way along the platform and live with big gaps in between and that's because they're experienced commuters, they know exactly where the door is going to stop so they all can get on and so there he would have been every day, always stood at exactly the same point, at exactly the same place on the platform and he'd always get on exactly the same carriage, on exactly the same train, exactly the same time and he'd sit in exactly the same seat next to a friend of his, well it wasn't a friend of his, it was just the guy who also sat in exactly the same seats next to him who got on a few stops before him.

So he got to know this guy quite well, you know, because they always sat in the same seats. But then on this one day something absolutely amazing happened. He slept through his alarm.

I mean this is a man who every day always woke up at the same time and this one day he slept through his alarm and so he didn't get up and he didn't get dressed and he didn't go and wait on the train platform and he didn't get on the same train and sit in the same seat.

In fact, someone else would have got on the train and sat in the seat that he always sat on. But you know what, that morning his train, which he always took, was in the Clapham Rail train disaster in 1988.

And the man that used to sit next to him every day was one of the 35 people who died. And do you know what, there was another man who sat in the very seat that he always sat in who died.

[20 : 19] How sad is that? Now the reason I tell you this story is because that story reminds us very much of what Jesus has done. You see, because we would be sitting in a seat of an impact that God will make to us for the wrong things that we've done.

And if you believe in Jesus, if you trust in Jesus, someone else will be sitting in your seat. Jesus will be sitting in your seat. When Jesus died on the cross, he died to save us from our sins.

He bore the impact that we would take for the wrong things that we've done instead of us. And that's why Christians, when we said earlier, we adore him. We adore Jesus because he died to save us from our sins.

What God would do that? See, Jesus was Emmanuel, God with us, but Jesus was God saves. It may be that you're here today and you've been a Christian for many, many years.

And I'd really like to encourage you on Christmas Day how extraordinary it is that God, your God, would become a rat to live in the sewer with rats so that you could know God, so you could understand God.

[21 : 42] I think the one thing that's really struck me this week as a Christian is how amazing that God would do that so that I could know him. So if you're a Christian, let's be thankful today on Christmas Day that Jesus was born in a manger because he was Emmanuel, God with us, so we could know God.

It may be you're here today and you're visiting and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. I can see lots of visitors. You're very, very welcome. Happy Christmas to you. Why not come to a course that we run?

Actually, in your service sheet, there's a little feedback form which you could fill out which is for a course we run called Christianity Explored. I often find that at Christmas time and in New Year you've got lots of time off and you can have mince pies and wine and read some books and do whatever you like to do, watch some TV.

But often New Year is a really good time to think about and evaluate your life and think, what do I want to do for the next year? Why not come on a course in January? So on a Wednesday night there will be a talk each week for seven weeks and there will be a chance for informal discussion.

Very open, non-manipulative. I think you'll really enjoy it. If you'd like to do that or would like some more information on that, why not fill in that box with your details? Sorry, this bit of paper and put it in the red box by the door.

[22 : 57] We'd love to hear from you on that. I'd love for you if you're not a Christian here today to go away and have a think about what I've said today.

That God is, Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, but also that Jesus, the name means God saves because first and foremost, the reason God came to earth is to save us.

And I'll tell you what, that is a great God. That is a great God. Let me just pray as we finish. Let me pray. Father God, we want to thank you so much that you sent the Lord Jesus into the world to be a rat, to live amongst the rats in the sewers, leaving the comforts of heaven so that you could help us to understand you.

Oh Lord Jesus, we want to thank you and praise you so much. We want to adore you for you gave your life on the cross so that we might be saved from our sins, so that we might no longer feel the burden of guilt so that all the skeletons in our closets are completely cleared away and we might not fear or have a guilty conscience because you sat in the seat that we should have been sitting in.

You took the punishment that we deserved. We praise you and adore you for you are a great God, Lord Jesus. Amen.