

No Ordinary Baby

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Preacher: Steve Brown

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 23rd of December 2001. The preacher is Steve Brown. His sermon is entitled An Ordinary Baby and is based on Revelation chapter 19 verses 11 to 16.

Bar Humbug. Bar Humbug was his favourite saying. He was a mean old man with no love in him whatsoever.

He looked down on everyone as being inferior. He was extremely tight with his money. He hated giving his employee Bob Cratchit any holidays whatsoever and he especially hated Christmas. That time of the year when people are happy. That time of the year when business stops and Bob Cratchit gets one day off.

That time of the year when children are playing in the streets making a lot of racket. That time of the year when people enjoy family. Ebenezer Scrooge hated Christmas. He didn't recognise the meaning of Christmas.

[1 : 17] He didn't recognise the glory of Christmas. He goes to sleep on Christmas Eve hoping to sleep through Christmas and miss the whole thing.

But he gets some visitors. Three ghosts. The ghost of Christmas past takes him back to when he was a child and Scrooge sees himself abandoned at Christmas by his parents.

left at the boarding school. He then sees his true love, Belle, break off their engagement at Christmas time.

Scrooge gets a reminder of Christmas past and he begins to recognise the meaning of Christmas. The second visitor, Christmas present, then comes to him and takes him to see his employee. Bob Cratchit and his family celebrating Christmas and Scrooge marvels at the joy this family has even though they're really, really poor and that their youngest son, Tiny Tim, is very sick and will probably die soon.

[2 : 26] Scrooge starts to recognise the meaning of Christmas. Finally, the ghost of Christmas future takes him to see his own grave and Scrooge learns that he died a lonely, old, bitter man and that everyone was glad to see him gone.

Finally, Scrooge recognises the meaning of Christmas and he's a changed man. He awakes on Christmas Day and he throws himself in all the festivities.

He buys presents for all the children. He gives extravagant amounts of money to charity. He visits Bob Cratchit's family and he gives them food and presents and he pays off the mortgage on the house.

He gives Bob extended holidays to spend with the family. He enjoys himself again. He enjoys Christmas again. Scrooge recognises the meaning of Christmas.

He's a changed man. But what is the meaning of Christmas? What is so glorious about Christmas that it can change a man like Scrooge?

[3 : 39] What do you think the glory of Christmas is? Well, let's go on a Christmas carol of our own to find out the glory of Christmas. Let's go to Christmas past.

I was 10 and I was really excited about Christmas. I was going to get heaps of unreal presents and I only wanted one present though. One in particular, Optimus Prime.

Fearless leader of the Autobot Transformers. Now, if you don't know what Transformers are, they're toys for boys and they're things that transform into robots.

They were great in the 80s. Well, I couldn't sleep the night before. I was so excited. Morning came and I jumped up.

I woke up all the family, dragged them into the family room around the Christmas tree and started opening up all the presents, one by one. But it wasn't there. Where was Optimus Prime?

[4 : 43] There was one last present though, from Nan. Could this be the one? I opened it slowly, with anticipation, and I found a beach towel.

You can probably imagine how excited I was over the moon. Christmas was an anti-climax for me. It didn't live up to expectations.

You see, the very first Christmas was a bit like that. It was an anti-climax. Christmas past was supposed to be a glorious event.

The people of Israel were expecting a glorious king to arrive and save them, rescue them from the Roman occupation of their land.

They expected this glorious king to make Israel a glorious kingdom, a kingdom that would rule the world forever and ever and a kingdom that would give God glory.

[5 : 48] Israel expected a glorious king, a glorious kingdom, a glorious Christmas. But what do they get on Christmas Day past? Well, certainly, a baby is born, but he doesn't look like a glorious king, does he?

You can follow it in Luke chapter 2 if you want to. His mother is pregnant out of wedlock. In those days, that's a big no-no.

You see, Jesus, people found out about it, he could be considered an illegitimate child, a social outcast, not having the same rights as others.

Well, Mary enters labour and there's no doctor, there's no nurse, there's no midwife, there's no hospitals, no painkillers, and there isn't even a bed for her in the local guest house.

Mary is forced to give birth in a stable full of animals. She wraps her son in bands of cloth because she doesn't have any baby clothes for him. They're poor.

[7 : 01] Jesus is born into a very poor family. He's placed in a manger, an animal feeding trough. Hardly a kingly entry into the world.

You see, kings are supposed to be born in palaces and sleep in beds made of silk. They're not supposed to be born in sheds and sleep in feeding troughs.

Christmas past doesn't live up to expectations. It's a bit of an anticlimax. but it's not an anticlimax just because of the bad circumstances that surround this birth.

It's not an anticlimax because of the bad circumstances that Jesus is born into. It's an anticlimax because hardly anyone recognises Jesus.

I remember when Prince William was born. I was pretty young myself but I remember it vividly.

There were thousands of reporters and cameras all around the hospital waiting for just one glimpse.

[8 : 13] The cameras are at every exit so that the royals couldn't smuggle this child out without people having a look. The paparazzi were disguising themselves trying to sneak past security to get that shot that would get them lots of money to see that one glimpse of that child.

The whole world was desperate for just one glimpse of the baby Prince William. You see everyone recognised the importance of that child.

Everyone wanted to see him. Everyone wanted to honour the new Prince of England. But no one seems to recognise this baby in the manger, do they? No one seems to recognise the glory of Christmas past.

No one seems to recognise the glory of Jesus. What an anticlimax. What an anticlimax. The Christmas past is not a total loss.

There are a few, just a handful, of people that recognise the glory of Christmas past, that recognise the glory of Jesus people.

[9 : 24] Because in that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. the only ones who recognise the glory of Christmas past are plain, ordinary, insignificant shepherds.

shepherds. Not the emperor Augustus, not the governor Corinthians, not the important leaders of Israel, not the priests and the teachers of the law in Jerusalem, not the people of the town of Bethlehem where he's born, but just plain, ordinary, insignificant shepherds.

They recognise the glory of Jesus. They recognise that this baby is their saviour, their Messiah, their Lord, their King. They recognise the glory of Christmas past, but everyone else misses it.

They don't recognise it at all. You see, they're not coming to see this child. They're not gathering around, clamouring around the shed for just one glimpse. They're not telling everyone how important this birth is.

They're not glorifying and praising God for his birth. They don't recognise the glory of Christmas past.

[10:51] It seems like a bit of an anticlimax. Hardly anyone recognises Jesus, except plain, ordinary, insignificant shepherds. Christmas present, today in Australia, is a lot different to Christmas past.

Christmas present seems to be anything but an anticlimax, doesn't it? It's a major event, full of activity, full of people shopping, frantically, on Christmas Eve, full of mums preparing great lunches, full of fathers dressing up in red suits and bellowing out ho, ho, ho, ho, full of children leaving out milk and cookies for Santa, full of families gathering around the TV watching corals by candlelight. It's become a major event. It's in our face from October onwards, tinsel everywhere, trees sprouting up all over the place, fairy lights, reindeers and sleighs stapled for roofs.

In fact, a couple of nights ago, we went and saw a house with 9,500 lights on it. It was very impressive. There are thousands of advertising brochures delivered to our mailing boxes.

It's hard not to recognise Christmas present in Australia. For most in Australia, Christmas present is a major event about spending time with family, loving people around you, going on holidays, beer and the Boxing Day test match, religious duty.

[12:39] Traditional Aussie barbecue, presents for the kids, debt, putting up with rallies and for us tonight, church. Australians recognise Christmas present but like Emperor Augustus and Governor Quirinius, like the leaders of Israel, the religious heavies of Jerusalem, the people of Bethlehem, they miss out on recognising the glory of Christmas present.

They miss out on recognising the glory of Jesus. They don't recognise that he's their saviour, their messiah, their lord and their king.

Today, people in Australia aren't crowding around the shed for just one glimpse. They're not telling everyone about this important birth. They're not glorifying and praising God for this child.

Australians don't recognise the glory of Christmas present. It's a bit of an anti-climax Christmas present. It's busy, hectic, flat out consuming but nonetheless an anti-climax because hardly anyone recognises Jesus.

that like Christmas past, it's not a total loss. There are a few, just a handful that recognise Christmas present.

[14:13] Just like the shepherds, there are a few ordinary and insignificant people. Just like the shepherds, Christians recognise the glory of Christmas present.

Just like the shepherds, they recognise that this man, Jesus, is their Saviour, their Messiah, their Lord and their King. And just like the shepherds, Christians give glory and praise to God, to this child.

Christmas present is a bit of an anti-climax. But some ordinary shepherds recognise Jesus. Some ordinary Christians recognise Jesus.

But one day everyone will recognise the glory of Jesus. Everyone will recognise the glory of Christmas future. Revelation 19, if you want to turn to it.

Verses 11 to 16 say this, Then I saw heaven opened and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True and in righteousness he judges and he makes war.

[15:23] His eyes are like the flame of fire and on his head are many diadems and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but he himself and he is clothed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is called the Word of God.

The armies of heaven wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations and he will rule them with a rod of iron.

He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God, the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

September 11 will be remembered for a very, very long time. It will definitely be recorded in all our history books for people to look back on, to contemplate, to think about and lament.

People will say, I remember where I was when I heard about the terrorist attacks. In fact, I was sitting just over there. Just like people today say, I remember where I was when people first walked on the moon.

[16:41] I remember where I was when I heard about Elvis passing away. I remember where I was when Princess Diana died.

Just like those days, September 11 will be a day to remember. One of those days that marks history, one of those days that marks our own lives, one of those days that stands as a signpost for us to look back on, one of those days that impacted the entire world, we all stopped.

But Christmas future will be far bigger than September 11. It will be far more momentous than man walking on the moon. You see, everyone who has ever lived will recognise the glory of Jesus. Not just shepherds, not just Christians. Everyone will recognise the glory of Christmas past, present and future. Try to imagine this if you can.

The heavens are torn open and through the tear comes a white horse symbolising victory and the rider that comes upon it comes to judge and to make war against his enemies, against those who don't recognise his glory.

[18:06] And his eyes are filled with the fire of God's wrath and he carries a sword that comes out of his mouth to strike down the nations and he rules the world with a crushing rod of iron.

He treads the winepress of God's judgement upon his enemies, against those who don't recognise his glory. The rider wears crowns of kingship on his head because his name is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

These symbols are a vivid picture of the return of Jesus. These symbols are a vivid picture of the glory of Christmas future.

Jesus was the glorious King of Christmas past but only the shepherds recognised it. Jesus is the glorious King of Christmas present.

Only Christians recognise it. Jesus will be the glorious King of Christmas future and everyone will recognise it. But only some will recognise it with joy and peace because they recognised his glory at Christmas past and present.

[19:28] They recognised that Jesus was the glorious King. They recognised that Jesus did in fact bring in God's glorious kingdom. They recognised that Jesus is in fact the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

But not only that, they recognised that Jesus wears a robe dipped in blood, soaked in blood.

Not other people's blood, his own, his own blood. They recognised that he died for their sins.

They recognised that this King, this glorious King went to the cross for them. They recognised that he rose from the dead to rule as King forever and they recognised that he is their Saviour, their Messiah, their Lord and their King.

And because they recognised this, they will ride white horses of victory forever. They won't be plain, ordinary and insignificant anymore.

[20:37] they will be dressed in fine white and pure linen of righteousness, cleansed from their sin forever, to live with their God forever.

No wonder the shepherds and the angels proclaimed glory and praise to God in those fields just outside Bethlehem 2,000 years ago.

But most will recognise the glory of Christmas future with fear and terror because they fail to recognise the glory of Christmas past and present.

They fail to recognise Jesus is the glorious King, the one who brought in God's glorious kingdom, the one who is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. But not only that, they fail to recognise that Jesus wears a robe soaked in blood.

His own blood. They fail to recognise that He died for their sins. His glorious King went to the cross for them and that He is their Saviour, the Messiah, their Lord and their King.

[21:49] And because they fail to recognise Jesus and His glory, they shall be cut down by the sword that comes from His mouth, the sword of the Word of God.

You see, God's word stands as a testimony and evidence against them. They won't be able to say, how was I supposed to know?

How was I supposed to recognise Jesus? No one told me. God's word told them. God's word is God's word.

That's the sword that Jesus wields to strike down the nations, His word. And because they fail to recognise the glory of Jesus, they will be placed in the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God and Jesus shall tread upon them.

It's very graphic, isn't it? It's pretty scary. It's a graphic picture of Christmas future. It's a graphic picture of judgement and of wrath on those who don't recognise Jesus.

[22 : 59] But it's only a graphic picture so that it serves as a warning to those people so that they too will come to recognise Jesus as their King so that they one day will be dressed in fine linen and be victorious themselves forever.

It's a graphic picture of grace and mercy. We see the King, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords wearing a robe dipped and drenched in his own blood.

Ebenezer Scrooge visited Christmas past, present and future and became a changed man. Tonight we're visited Christmas past, present and future.

Do you recognise the glory of Christmas? Do you recognise the glory of Jesus, King of Kings? Lord of Lords. Amen.

I'm going to pray right now so we'll bow our heads. Dear God, thank you that you sent Jesus to earth at Christmas past so that we could see his glory and your glory.

[24 : 25] Thank you that you reveal your glory to plain, ordinary and insignificant people people like us. Dear Lord, help us to recognise the glory of Christmas.

Help us to recognise the glory of Jesus, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the King that died on the cross for us. We pray that this Christmas we wouldn't fail to recognise the glory of Jesus and thank you that one day those who recognise you will ride white horses of victory and wear fine linen of righteousness.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.