

Goodness, Gracious?

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Preacher: Warwick Grant

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 19th of December 1999. The preacher is Warwick Grant.

His sermon is entitled, Goodness Gracious? and is from Hebrews chapter 1 verses 1 to 6.

I wonder if you're old enough to remember when these words were spoken.

Words spoken by Neil Armstrong as he placed his boot on the moon in July 1969. My uncle actually saved a copy of the Herald from that day and the headline is the biggest headline I've ever seen. Man walks on the moon. That's pretty amazing and so is the price. It was four cents. But I'm just old enough to remember the event.

[1 : 15] Just old enough. I remember being in my first year of primary school and watching it on TV in the classroom at East Ivanhoe Primary School. Fantastic stuff I thought.

And even as a five year old I could remember absolutely marvelling at the fact that human beings were walking on another celestial body on the moon. It really was fantastic.

Now the word fantastic comes from the word fantasy. Men walking on the moon, that's the stuff of fantasy. Yes, it was actually happening.

It wasn't fantasy anymore. Well, a man and as it turns out twelve men walked on the moon. That might have been a great event for humankind.

But that was nothing compared to the event which was when God came in the person of his son Jesus and walked on the earth. And that's what we celebrate every Christmas.

[2 : 24] As I said before, we remember that God left the splendour of heaven and was born to Mary and grew up to be a man. This man was given the name Jesus.

As I said before, the name that means Yahweh saves or God saves. This is an even more fantastic and amazing event than Neil Armstrong walking on the moon.

But is Jesus coming to the earth the stuff of fantasy? I mean, really, is it just some stupid legend or fairy tale that was made up centuries ago and people down through the ages have been stupid enough to believe it, including many of us?

Oh no. God coming to the earth in human form might seem like the stuff of fantasy, but just as much as Neil Armstrong walking on the moon was a real event of history, so was Jesus being born to Mary in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago.

It isn't fantasy at all. This is truth with a capital T. How can I be so sure?

[3 : 41] I just want to read for you the first few verses from Luke's gospel or story about Jesus. You don't have to follow, but if you want to, it's on page 830 of the Bibles in the seats in front of you.

I'll just explain that this guy Luke was a medical doctor. He wasn't an eyewitness himself of Jesus' ministry, but he wanted to write an orderly account of what Jesus had said and done.

And this is what he wrote at the very start of his gospel. The first four verses I'll be reading. Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Luke mentions a guy called Theophilus and most people think he was a patron of Luke in some way, someone who supported Luke in some way. And Luke wanted this guy, Theophilus, to know that what he'd been hearing about Jesus was true.

John, in his gospel, the next gospel in the Bible, also speaks of the truth of the stories about Jesus. They weren't fictional stories, they were truth.

[5 : 20] Let me give you just a little bit more evidence of the truth of Jesus Christ. One historian dismisses those who hold that Jesus is just a figure of fantasy or legend with these words.

The legendary or mythical theory of Christ's existence is not held by anyone worthy of the name scholar.

The historical evidences of Christ's existence are so much greater than those in support of any other event in ancient history. No candid scholar could reject them without also renouncing his belief in every event recorded in ancient history.

In my own reading and preparing for this morning, I've discovered no less than 15 ancient writers who weren't Christians who refer to Christ and Christianity.

What I'm trying to do here, I suppose, is just to say that even though the fact of God visiting the earth as a baby, being born to Mary, is an amazing event to contemplate, and it sort of borders on the realms of fantasy, it's true.

[6 : 36] It actually happened. It is a real event of historical fact. And no one, including me and you, can get away from that.

Well, now we come to look briefly at the Bible passage that was read for us this morning. And I encourage you to have it open in front of you so you can follow along. It's on page 970 of the Bibles in the Seats.

Page 970. And this is the letter to the Hebrews. Let me read the first two verses of the letter for us. Now, it seems that the recipients of this letter were Jewish Christians.

That is, Jewish people who had come to realise that Jesus was the Saviour, the Messiah, they were expecting and looking forward to. Now, of course, many Jewish people hadn't and sadly still haven't accepted the fact that Jesus is the one, the Saviour, who God has promised.

[8 : 06] The recipients of this letter would have been familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures and how God had spoken to his people through the writers of the Old Testament. But this revealing of God to his people in the Old Testament was sort of fragmentary and it didn't have fullness and finality.

The writer goes on in verse 2 to say that in these last days, he has spoken to us by a son. So, God has now revealed himself to us in a most superlative way and that's in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

A number of people I've listened to over the years at parties, for example, when you end up talking about things, you have time to talk about deep things, the meaning of life and stuff like that.

And you hear people interviewed on television sometimes and they espouse their theories of God, what they think God is like, who they think God is, what they think God is on about.

And they try and guess at what God's like from their limited and often incorrect knowledge about him. But God doesn't want to waste our time getting us to try and guess at what he's like.

[9 : 26] He doesn't play games with us like that. He loves us too much. No, he reveals himself to us through his Son, through Jesus. As the New Testament letter to the Colossians puts it, in Colossians 1.15, it says, Jesus is the visible expression of the invisible God.

Jesus is the visible expression of the invisible God. If I can say this without sounding reverent, it's a bit like God saying, ta-da, I'm here.

This is what I'm like. When we see Jesus, we see God revealed completely, utterly, perfectly, ultimately, fully, comprehensively.

Do you get the idea? We don't have to guess about God anymore. He's revealed himself fully to us in his Son, in Jesus. Jesus.

I wonder if you've heard a little kid ask the question maybe they've asked you, if you're a parent. When you're a parent, they might have asked, Mummy or Daddy, how old is Jesus?

[10 : 42] Well, I've heard that quite a bit recently as we come up to the year 2000. And the father might say, well, son, Jesus is 2000 years old. But that's not really right.

You see, Jesus is fully man, but he's also fully divine. He's fully God. We need to understand that Jesus has always been around, for all time.

The end of the second verse of this letter says that it was through Jesus that God created the worlds. So Jesus was actually present and involved in the whole creation of the universe.

We need to understand that it's not as if Jesus just came to an existence as a baby when he was born to Mary 2000 years ago. He had existed before that in God.

There was never a time when Jesus didn't exist. Sure, he became a human 2000 years ago when he was born, but he had always existed in God. verse 3 of Hebrews chapter 1 reminds us of the things we were just speaking about.

[11:55] It says, he is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being. So Jesus shows us what God's like.

No more guessing. verse 3 goes on to say that the Son sustains all things by his powerful word. Some people I think regard God as like a watchmaker or a clockmaker who sort of makes a clock, winds it up, sits on his bench and then goes on a holiday and he hasn't been seen since. They think he's an absentee God. That it's garbage. Nothing could be further from the truth. Verse 3 tells us that Jesus sustains us and sustains all things by his powerful word.

And I think of the planets in their orbits around the sun. I think of our political situation on our planet. All things, Jesus sustains them by his powerful word.

[12:59] Jesus is active and working in his universe and in the lives of his people. He is by no means absent.

I for one and many of you here this morning I know could testify to Jesus' presence and work in your lives. Jesus isn't absent.

No way. Let me go on in verse 3. When he had made purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Well how did Jesus make purification for sins? Well as a grown man we all remember the story of as a grown man Jesus died on the cross at Easter and that's the story we remember.

He died on the cross to take the punishment for the wrong things we do. And God in his total goodness graciously became one of us as a human being in order to help us as we were talking about with little Joshua before.

[14:05] Now grace is a word we don't use very much these days but it means unmerited favour. God extends his undeserved favour to all of us to me and to you by graciously giving us his son.

He didn't have to send us Jesus he could have just abandoned us to our sinful desires but he loved us too much. he came after us in his son. We worship a good and gracious and loving as well as a just God and he sent Jesus to die to take the punishment for us.

You noticed in the drama that the characters kept saying goodness gracious to remind us of God's complete goods and his grace to us in giving us his son Jesus.

Well verse 3 tells us that Jesus sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. Well this denotes that Jesus in sitting down had completed his task like we would sit down after we've had a hard day's work.

Jesus sat down he'd completed and finished what God had given him to do the work of saving us from our sins. All that we need to re-establish our severed relationship with God has been completely done for us by Jesus.

[15:30] The last couple of verses we'll look at this morning talk about the angels. It says here that the son having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For which of the angels did God ever say for to which of the angels did God ever say you are my son today I have begotten you or again I will be his father and he will be my son.

There seems to be a bit of resurgence of interest in angels these days even in non-Christian bookshops you see books on angels but angels are not to be worshipped and God makes it clear to us here that Jesus is superior to the angels remember it was the angels who sang praises to God when Jesus was born as is recorded for us in chapter 2 of Luke's gospel and as we saw in the drama earlier.

So why did God send Jesus? Well the main reason was what we were alluding to before when we saw little Joshua remember the name Jesus means God saves and the only saviour who can save us from our sins is Jesus.

We need to swallow our pride don't we to admit that we are sinners we do wrong things but we are all of us sinners and sinners need a saviour.

[17:05] An anonymous poet summed it up in these words brigade if aí we to understand mine we need it to admit if we knew it we need it to be to send us a scientist If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer.

But our greatest need was forgiveness. So God sent us a saviour. With the death of Jesus, our forgiveness is made possible.

Jesus himself said in John's Gospel, I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.

God's Son Jesus was born to us and for us. The only way to receive and accept God's forgiveness is to accept his Son, Jesus.

Well, in his famous oratorio, the Messiah, George Frederick Handel, took some words from the book of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah that spoke of the promise of God's Son coming.

[18 : 29] And he put those words to music. I'm going to play a very brief excerpt from the Messiah and it will be very familiar to many of you. Just as you listen to this chorus, Unto us a child is born.

Reflect on God's gift of his Son to you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[21 : 17] And in doing that, I saved my life. I changed my mind and I saved my life. I began thinking, that's the same with Jesus, you know.

If you are refusing Jesus' offer of forgiveness and eternal life, you need to change your mind about him and accept what he offers you freely.

In doing that, you will save your very life. You will enjoy eternal life with God in heaven. Don't run away from God.

Don't run away from God. Change your mind. Turn back to him. Then you will save your life and enjoy his love forever. Following or rejecting Jesus is an eternal life or death matter.

This Christmas, let's try and not get too caught up in all the commercial hoo-ha of the season. Let's remember what the whole season is about.

[22 : 22] God's gift of God's gift of his Saviour Son to us, Jesus. Come, let's try and not get too caught up in all the people of God. Come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.