

CHRISTMAS DAY - Messengers of Peace

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Date: 25 December 1997

Preacher: Hilary Roath

[0 : 00] This is the 1997 Christmas Day service. The preacher is Hilary Roth.

The sermon is entitled Messengers of Peace and is from Luke chapter 2 verses 1 to 20. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. People like Christmas for all sorts of reasons. The family gathering, the heartwarming music, the decorations and for the children of course, their presents play a very important part of their love for Christmas.

But I can't help thinking that Christmas often fails to speak to us because we've made it so pretty. We've made it soft and tinkling.

Not that I see any reason why we should not step out for a few hours of this time of the year. Step out back into our childhood.

[1 : 12] It won't do us any harm to sing a few carols, to pull a few Christmas crackers, to wear a funny paper hat.

And it's all to the good that families should gather today around the Christmas tree. And if there are children into which and to whose sense of wonder we can enter, so much the better.

But how? But how? How deeply will this affect us? How deeply will this day affect us for the rest of our lives?

Is there any real connection between the Christmassy world that we have created and the world that Jesus was born into and our real world?

Is there any real connection? Because the child that we are remembering today was actually homeless.

[2 : 23] He was shoved off into a stable. And shortly afterwards his parents became refugees on the road to Egypt. And close behind them came Herod's soldiers, nosing out every newborn baby, every newborn child to kill it, to exterminate, hopefully exterminating this child who we are talking about today.

And it's always been like that for this child. This child, as he grew up, was even a fugitive. They hounded him from every place until, last of all, they shoved him out of this world completely. They shoved him out as he died on the cross. They had no use for him, this man who loved others. They had no use for him, this man who loved all others. They shoved him out. There was nothing idyllic about Christmas.

It was bare, it was cold, and it was very tough. Perhaps someone's thinking, oh, but you're spoiling it.

[3 : 52] You're killing the lightheartedness. You're minimizing the fun. I don't think I am. Because I believe Christmas will say something at a deep down level to us.

If we see it for what it was before sentimentality turned it into an idol. Because if we look at the real Christmas, at that child who was shoved out, and at the parents who are fleeing, we are looking then at the beginning of one who knows his way around the ruins of our world.

We are looking at the one who was wounded himself. And he was wounded for us. This is the Christ who is not switched off when we switch off the electric lights of our Christmas trees, our Christmas trees of make-believe.

The real Christ, the Christ in the wooden crib, the Christ on the cross, knows our world. So what is the meaning of this Christmas message?

The message is that Christ has come to where we are. Christ has come to where we are. He doesn't shout down instructions from some intercom system.

[5 : 32] He comes to live where we are. Where we worry about what's going to happen next in Africa or Israel or Northern Ireland.

He comes to where drug addiction is engulfing thousands of people, young and old alike. He comes to us when we fall down so often that we are almost ashamed to try again.

Christ came here himself. He understands how the real world feels.

The harsh world, the grey world, he understands everything. He understands you and he understands me. He understands our pain, our fears, our frustrations, our shame, our depression. The Christ of the real Christmas comes to where I am, comes to where you are. No event in the history of the world has been so celebrated in word and song as the birth of Jesus Christ.

[6 : 56] And yet this story that we read today, which is told by Luke, told by him in such an undramatic way, we are told of the actual birth of the baby.

We have told it in the most simplest of words. She gave birth to her firstborn, a son. And so the son of God enters into our world in utter humility and without any fanfare.

It was a census ordered by Caesar Augustus, who was the ruler of the Roman Empire, which brought Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

everyone had been ordered to return to their own town to register on the tax rolls. And Mary and Joseph had made this journey about 80 miles from their home in Galilee to this ancient city of Bethlehem, which was the family home of the famous King David.

And this fulfills God's Old Testament promise that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. And after the birth of Jesus, his mother wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger.

[8 : 27] And it's only at the end of the story do we find out that the inns were all full in Bethlehem. So we know now that it was among the animals that Jesus was born.

He was laid in a manger, which is a feeding trough. for cattle. And so, is it any wonder that this scene has been captured by artists and poets down through the centuries?

But we must not be so fascinated by the romanticized version of this event that we miss its true meaning, that we miss its true significance.

Here is the word of God made flesh. Made flesh for us and for our salvation.

the first audience to hear the good news was a band of shepherds lying out in the fields near Bethlehem.

[9 : 38] And King David had been a shepherd out on those same fields. And now the birth and the news of the birth of one far greater than David is given to the shepherds.

and the darkness of the night is shattered by this bright light of angelic beings. Do not be afraid is one of the key messages of this Christmas story.

Peace is the key message of this Christmas story. the angel said I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people.

And we need to notice that that this news is for everybody. It is for all people. So what was this good news?

It was not that God had sent a soldier. It was not that God had sent a judge or a reformer. But God had sent a saviour.

[10 : 48] A saviour to meet our greatest need. Our greatest need is to have peace with God. It was a message of peace for the whole world.

The Jewish word shalom means peace. But it means much more than truth in our everyday battles of life.

It means well-being, health, prosperity and security. And it has much more to do with character than it has to do with circumstances.

We see there that life was difficult at that time just as it is today. taxes were high and employment was high.

Morals were slipping lower. The military state was in control. Roman law, Greek philosophy and even Jewish religion could not meet the needs of the human heart.

[11 : 57] The needs of peace with God. then God sent his son. God's glory came to earth in the person of his son.

And one of the lessons that God has for us here is that we need to make peace. We need to make peace first of all with God because that's where peace begins.

we need to stop thinking. If we do stop thinking and try and analyse our own where we are before God, we might realise that we are actually running from God.

Perhaps we're running from him because we are afraid of him. but the angel said do not be afraid. We need to be aware of where we stand with God. We need to stop running.

[13:12] We need to stop running and allow God to catch us, to allow him to give us his love and his life. And we need to respond with our love and our life.

Often we do not experience God's peace because we do not stand still. We get caught up in our own busyness just like that inn keeper on the night that Jesus was born.

But God has dealt with us in God's dealt with it through his son. And he offers us forgiveness. We need to accept his forgiveness.

God wants us to come home. He wants us to belong to him. Whatever we have done we can come home and we can be forgiven and be reconciled with God, be at peace with him.

We need also to be at peace with our neighbours, to be at peace with our families, between husbands and wives, parents and children.

[14:33] And we need also to find inner peace that comes from being at peace within ourselves. glory to God in the highest the angel says, and on earth peace among those whom he favours.

The shepherds went and they saw that baby, they saw the Messiah, the saviour of the world, the bringer of peace. And in the last verse of our reading today, we read that after the shepherds had seen these wonderful things, they went back into the fields.

We don't know how long they stayed with Mary and Joseph and Jesus, we doubt they said, but we do know what the shepherds did, that the shepherds did not keep to themselves, this wonderful news.

They spread the word, and their message was not so much about the baby, their message was rather the angels message.

A saviour has been born to you, and he is the Messiah, Christ the Lord. Each year at Christmas, we celebrate the birth of God's son.

[16:00] We celebrate these events, but where will we be when the excitement and the fun is over? How can these events that we remember today affect our lives?

How can these events change the lives that we lead back in our jobs, our homes, and our schools? angels? Well, if we believe the message of the angels, to you is born this day in the city of David, a saviour, who is the Messiah, Christ the Lord.

If you believe that message is for you, to you is born this day, a saviour, who is Christ the Lord. if you believe the angels' message is for you, you can go back into your ordinary everyday life as God's peacemakers.

You can live the message out and become peacemakers. You can experience the life-changing reality of Christmas, which is the real meaning after all that we are celebrating today.

Amen. Honez. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[17:55] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.