

CHRISTMAS DAY - The First Christmas Gift

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 December 1999

Preacher: Phil Meulman

[0 : 00] The First Christmas Gift Our great God, we thank you for sending our Saviour into the world.

And God, we pray now that as we hear your word, that you would speak to us, and that we would indeed worship you as King. Amen. Please be seated.

Well, how many times this year have we heard the Christmas story? Once, twice, half a dozen times? Are we sick of hearing it?

Do we think of the Christmas story as fact or fiction? Is it something, the Christmas story, is it something that stirs nothing within us because we've heard it so much?

Because we've heard it so much, we're numb of it. It just goes over our heads. Or does the Christmas story conjure up a negative image within us because of the hustle and bustle that leads to this very day?

[1 : 32] I went shopping at Meijer on Thursday to complete my Christmas shopping and ran into a couple of parishioners as I was looking for some presents.

And I came out bewildered and horrified from my experience of trying to be served and finding what I was looking for. There was just people everywhere. It was bedlam.

Well, this morning, as the Bible was read, did you hear what was said? Did you hear what was read? Or did you shut off after the first couple of sentences because you've heard this same passage where the angel appears to Joseph?

You've heard this same passage read over perhaps the past couple of weeks or you hear it every year or you just know the story so well. I want to share with you a story that was given to me this week about two Christians who were invited, American Christians, who were invited by the Russian Department of Education to teach over there in a large orphanage.

And one of the teachers relays this story. It was nearing the holiday season, time for the orphans to hear for the first time the story of Christmas.

[2 : 49] We told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem. Finding no room at the inn, the couple went to a stable where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger.

Completing the story, we gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was given a small paper square cut from yellow napkins I had brought with me. See, no coloured paper was available in the city. Following instructions, the children tore the paper and carefully laid the strips in the manger for straw.

Small squares of flannel cut from a worn-out nightgown were used for the baby's blanket. A doll-like baby was cut from tan felt we had brought with us.

The orphans were busy assembling their manger as I walked among them to see if they needed any help. All went well until I got to one table where little Misha sat.

[4 : 03] He looked to be around about six years old and had finished his project. As I looked at the little boy's manger I was startled to see not one but two babies in the manger.

Quickly I called for the translator to ask why this lad had to ask why there were two babies. Crossing his arms in front of him and looking at his completed manger scene the child began to repeat the story very seriously.

For such a young boy about six years old remember who had only heard the Christmas story once he related the happenings accurately until he came to the part where Mary put the baby Jesus in the manger.

Then Misha started to ad lib. He made up his own ending to the story as he said and when Maria laid the baby in the manger Jesus looked at me and asked if I had a place to stay.

I told him I have no mama and I have no papa so I don't have any place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him but I told him I couldn't because I didn't have a gift to give him like everybody else did.

[5 : 39] But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. I thought maybe if I kept him warm that would be a good gift.

so I asked Jesus if I keep you warm will that be a good enough gift? And Jesus told me if you keep me warm that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me.

So I got into the manger and then Jesus looked at me and he told me I could stay with him for always. as little Misha finished the story his eyes brimmed full of tears which trickled down his little cheeks.

Putting his hands over his face his head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed and sobbed. The little orphan had found someone who would never abandon him nor abuse him.

someone who would stay with him for always. I have read this story over and over and each time it is more powerful than the last.

[7 : 12] The reason I think is because the gospel message about the coming of Jesus Christ is a message of hope. and to this little boy Misha it brought great joy as he realised that he could be with Jesus forever.

The world around him had crumbled thus making him an orphan but the story of Jesus coming into the world was a message of hope for him now and forever.

there was nothing that Misha could give except himself and that's just what he did isn't it? Well this story of Misha is a good story it brings out our emotions and so on but the reason the story is a good story is because he's heard the Christmas story and the Christmas story is a timeless message for our world for our cosmopolitan Melbourne here in Australia it's a timeless message for us here and today there is such despair and anguish among people there is little hope and that's why we have seen in the papers in recent weeks state governments looking at the problem of drugs the use of illicit drugs in our society drug use is in epidemic proportions because I think for many people there is little or no hope amongst them and you see that particularly amongst teenagers and young adults but there is hope and the hope is seen in

Jesus we the church have got news of hope and joy to proclaim to all people we have the proclamation of good news through the coming of Jesus Christ that's why many of us are here today the story of Jesus coming to the world is a simple story to communicate but its truths are profound they have eternal consequences for all people for in the coming of Jesus Emmanuel God is with us that's what Emmanuel means and that's what we heard in that Matthew passage that was read to us in the coming of Jesus Emmanuel God is with us now the prediction of Jesus coming was made centuries before by the prophet Isaiah as was and as was the way he would come and that is Jesus would be born through a virgin and today through the

Holy Spirit Christ is present in the life of every believer perhaps not even Isaiah understood how far reaching the meaning of Emmanuel would be when he prophesied the coming of God's son I wonder if our way with society really knows the Christmas story and the good news that it is do people really understand that God has intervened to rescue those who believe in him from this decaying world in which we live I'm sure that many many people do not perhaps because the story of Christmas has been subsumed in the rush to satisfy our need for presents at this time of the year and so on there is a sense in which Western culture at least has moralised Christmas to the point of saying peace and goodwill to all people and we express our peace to others by sharing presents with those whom we choose to share them with and last night on the carols on channel nine the introduction was peace and goodwill amongst men and women as well I imagine that was the sort of message it proclaimed well in a sense that is right it is about peace and goodwill but it's more than just that it's more than just peace and goodwill shared amongst people

[11 : 44] Christmas is the beginning of where we see God making his peace with people now this passage that from Matthew's gospel which was read to us tells us that Mary's son is to be named Jesus as he Jesus will be the person who saves people from their sins and it is of course by Jesus death on the cross and resurrection that the price for our sin is paid Jesus is an extraordinary gift given to us by God announced by the angels which creates peace between him and us and the peace that comes over us for those who believe in him is that we begin to understand the plan that God has put in place to rescue this wayward and sinful world this story about Misha finishes with a

reflection from the person who wrote it and he says this it's not what you have in your life but who you have in your life that counts it's not what you have in your life but who you have in your life that counts

I'm sure many of us today and probably already have I know my family has have had lots of presents to play with and they'll have lots of those presents to play with and use in the weeks ahead some of them will break but some will last and so on there will be plenty of rich food to eat and share as well but when the food is finished when the presents have worn out what's next what brings meaning to our life as we face the year 2000 let me challenge you today to look to a person the greatest person that has ever lived Jesus Christ God with us I want to challenge each one of us this Christmas to know that before God our life does count he counts us into his kingdom when we look to him through his son do you know who God is if not then look to Jesus and offer yourself to God through him one song writer hymn writer knowing that Jesus is the one to God writes these words take my life and I want to read to you just a couple of lines from each of those verses and conclude with the final verse he writes this take my life and let it be all you purpose Lord for me take my hands and let them move at the impulse of your love take my voice and let me sing always only for my king Jesus take my wealth all I possess make me rich in faithfulness take my motives and my will all you purpose to fulfill and finally the last verse says take my love my Lord I pour at your feet its treasure store take myself and I will be yours for all eternity my prayer is that you will know the presence and the peace of the one who is God's gift our source of hope and new life this Christmas and forever more Amen with friends for all Thank you.