

And So This is Christmas

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Preacher: Warwick Grant

[0 : 00] This is the evening service of Holy Trinity on the 10th of December 2000.

The preacher is Warwick Grant and his service is entitled And So This Is Christmas. I wonder if you were actually alive when these words were spoken.

There's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind. Okay, there's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.

Words spoken by Neil Armstrong as he put his boot on the surface of the moon in July 1969. My uncle actually saved a copy of the Herald from that very day.

And I haven't seen a headline quite as big. But yeah, it was a pretty significant occasion. For the first time, people had left the earth and set foot on another celestial body.

[1 : 14] I'm only just old enough to remember it. I was in prep at East Ivanhoe Primary School and we watched it on a black and white TV in the classroom.

And it was fantastic stuff. And even as a five-year-old, I was marvelling at the fact that people were on the moon. I couldn't believe it.

It was really fantastic. Now, the word fantastic comes from the word fantasy. Men walking on the moon, well, that's the stuff of fantasy, isn't it?

But it was actually happening. It was not fantasy at all. Well, a man walking on the moon might have been a great event for humankind.

But that's nothing compared to the event when God came and walked on the earth. Men have walked on the moon, but God as Jesus walked on the earth.

[2 : 14] And that's what we remember at Christmas time. God leaving the splendour of heaven and coming to the earth as a human person. This man was given the name Jesus.

It's even more fantastic to think about than Neil Armstrong walking on the moon. But is God leaving heaven and coming to earth? Is that the stuff of fantasy?

Is it just some sort of stupid legend or fairy tale that Christians have been gullible enough to believe and it's been passed down from century to century and we still swallow it these days?

Oh, no. God coming to the earth in human form might seem like the stuff of fantasy, but it's just as much an event of history as Neil Armstrong was walking on the moon on July the 20th, 1969.

It isn't fantasy at all. It's truth. It really happened. Well, how can I be so sure? Well, let me read to you the first four verses of Luke's story about Jesus.

[3 : 24] If you want to follow, it's on page 830 of the Black Bibles in the Seats. Page 830. Just while you find it, I'll explain.

Luke was actually a medical doctor and he was a pretty diligent recorder of the events of Jesus' life. From what I understand, he wasn't an eyewitness of Jesus' life, but he heard about Jesus, put his faith and trust in him and wrote down what those who did know Jesus had done, wrote down a record of it for us, which is recorded for us and preserved for us in the Bible.

Let me read to you just the first four verses of Luke's gospel. Luke wrote, 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 were 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.

This guy Theophilus that he refers to, we think, was perhaps a patron of Luke in some way, a guy who supported Luke. And Luke wanted this guy Theophilus to know that the stuff he'd heard about Jesus was really true.

It really happened. And John, in his gospel, John was Jesus' best mate. He wrote the next gospel. He also says similar things, that I'm writing this stuff because I know it's true and I want you to know as well.

[5 : 09] Let me give you even more evidence of the truth of Jesus Christ. There's one historian who dismisses those who think that Jesus is just a fairy tale. He dismisses those sort of people with these words.

He writes, The legendary or mythical theory of Christ's existence is not held by anyone worthy of the name of scholar. The historical evidences of Christ's existence are so much greater 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. Now that's a lot of gobbledygook. Basically it says, if you don't believe in Jesus, you're really not worth to be an historian because there's so much evidence in the Bible and outside the Bible that points to the truth of Jesus.

In my own reading, I've realised and found that there are no less than 15 ancient writers who weren't Christians who refer to Christ and Christianity.

Briefly, I suppose what I'm trying to do is to say that even though the fact of God visiting our planet as a human being, that is as Jesus, is an amazing thing to think about and to grapple with.

[6 : 36] It's a fact of history and it really happens. And no one, including you and me, can run away from that. We're talking about a real event of time, of history.

So now we come to look briefly at the Bible passage that was just read for us. And if you want to follow it with me, we're just going to look at it and it's on page 970. Let me just read the first couple of verses that were written to the Hebrews.

Page 970. Now, the recipients of this letter were probably Jewish Christians.

That is, Jewish people who had accepted that Jesus indeed was the Messiah who God had promised and who they were expecting. Now, of course, many Jewish people hadn't and still haven't accepted that Jesus is the Saviour of the world, that God has promised.

The Jewish people would have been familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures and how God had spoken to his people through prophets and other ways. But this revealing of God to his people was sort of fragmentary.

[8 : 13] It was a bit bitsy, like an occasion there, an occasion there. It was fragmentary and lacked fullness and finality. The writer goes on to say in verse 2 that in these last days he has spoken to us by a son.

God has now revealed himself in a most superlative way, in the best way he can, in the person of his son, Jesus. A number of people I've listened to over the years, I might have heard them interviewed on TV or radio, they have their own theories about God.

Maybe you have your own theory about God. And sometimes those sort of people try and guess what God's like. They sort of postulate, well, I think God is this, that or that.

And often they've got very limited knowledge about the Bible and about how God has revealed himself, even incorrect knowledge. And God, anyway, doesn't want us to waste our time trying to guess at what he's like.

He doesn't sort of sit back and say, well, let them work it out for themselves. He doesn't play games with us like that. He loves us too much. No, God actually reveals himself to us in his son, in Jesus.

[9 : 34] A verse in the New Testament letter to the Colossians puts it like this. In Colossians 1, verse 15, it says, Jesus is the visible expression of the invisible God.

The visible expression of the invisible God. It's kind of like God saying, ta-da, this is what I'm like. I think that's a good way of thinking of it. God saying, look, here I am. This is me. This is what I'm like. And if you look at Jesus, you see what God is like. So when we see Jesus, we see God revealed completely, utterly, perfectly, ultimately, finally, and comprehensively.

Do you get the idea? God has revealed himself to us in Jesus. We don't have to guess anymore. He's revealed himself to us.

I wonder if you've ever been around little children and they might have asked the question, well, how old is Jesus? I was once in a Christian religious education class at a primary school and a kid fired that question at me.

[10 : 45] Well, and as we come up to the year 2001, we might say, well, son, Jesus is around 2,000 years old. But that's not really right. You see, Jesus is fully human, fully a man, but he's also

100% fully divine as well.

He's fully man and fully God at the same time. This is one of the mysteries of Jesus, that he's God and man at the same time. But that's what we believe as Christians and that's what we know to be the truth.

But if Jesus is God, it means he's always been around. It's not like Jesus just was created when he was born to Mary and he was born as a baby and, oh, there's Jesus. He's always been around. He never had a beginning. Before the universe and the galaxies were made, he was there with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Bible makes it clear that Jesus was very much involved in the creation of the universe.

He has always been around for all time. It's simply that 2,000 years ago he visited the earth as a human being. The end of the second verse labours that point about that it was through Jesus that God created the worlds.

[12:01] It's not as if he just came into existence 2,000 years ago as a baby. He has always existed. Verse 3 of Hebrews chapter 1 reminds us of the things that we've just been talking about.

It says, he is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being. And it goes on to say that the Son sustains us, sustains all things by his powerful word.

Some people really feel that God just made the universe and then it's just nicked off. Like a clockmaker who makes a clock, winds it up, puts it on the shelf and goes on a holiday. Never to be seen again perhaps.

An absentee God. Well, that's not the sort of God we worship. We know that God is very much involved in our lives. Verse 3 tells us that God sustains all things by his powerful word.

So Jesus is active and he's working in the lives of his people. He's not absent. Sometimes we might feel that he's absent but we know our feelings aren't reliable.

[13:11] Whether we feel he's there or not, he is there if we trust in him. He's always there for us. That was one of his promises to us. He would never leave us or forsake us.

I for one and many others present here tonight could attest to Jesus presence and his work in their lives. He loves us and he's active in the lives of all of us if we trust in him.

Let me just 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 most of us know that Jesus died on the cross to take the punishment for the wrong things that we do.

In his total goodness he graciously came down to the earth became a human being in order to help us. And grace is a word that we don't use very much these days.

[14:13] We say a prayer that we call grace before meals. I have a sister-in-law whose name is Grace but a lot of people don't really know what the word means. It actually means unmerited favour.

Unmerited favour. God extends his undeserved favour to us by giving us Jesus and sending us his son. He didn't have to do that. We certainly didn't deserve it.

He just does it because he's a gracious God and he lavishes his love on us. Verse 3 tells us also that Jesus sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

And this sitting down denotes that Jesus had completed his work. You do a job and then you sit down when you're finished. This sitting down is an important little clause because it tells us that Jesus had completed his work of purification for sins.

The work of rescuing us from the consequences of our sins and enabling us to be forgiven. All that we need to do to have a re-established relationship with God has been done.

[15:20] Jesus has completely done it. We don't have to do anything except trust him. Verses 4 and 5 remind us about Jesus' superiority to God's messengers, the angels.

It says there having become as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. There seems to be a lot of interest in angels these days.

You see lots of books in just secular bookshops on angels. But they're not to be worshipped.

They're part of God's creation. God makes it clear to us that Jesus is superior to the angels.

Remember after all it was the angels who sang praises to God when Jesus was born. So clearly they are underneath if you like Jesus in that sort of hierarchy.

hierarchy. So why did God send Jesus? Well the name Jesus means God saves and the only saviour who can rescue us from our sins is Jesus.

[16:29] We all have to swallow our pride a bit don't we to admit that we're sinful that we all do wrong things. But we are all of us sinful. Romans 3.23 says all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and sinners need a saviour.

One poet summed it up in these words If our greatest need had been information God would have sent us an educator. If our greatest need had been money God would have sent us an economist. If our greatest need had been technology God would have sent 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 a saviour. With the death of Jesus our forgiveness is made possible.

Jesus himself said in John's Gospel chapter 14 I am the way the truth God's God's son Jesus was born to us and for us.

[17:50] The only way to accept God's forgiveness is to accept his son. have you accepted Jesus as the one who has saved you from your sins?

You might remember a couple of years ago there was a Swiss Air aircraft that took off from the east coast of America bound for Europe and it plunged into the Atlantic Ocean killing everyone on board. It was a terrible tragedy. one guy who was meant to be on this flight was a Swiss tennis player. I'm sorry I can't remember his name but he just completed a tournament in the United States and for whatever reason he decided to postpone his trip back to Europe and he didn't take that flight that he was originally booked on.

And he woke the following morning to the news of this tragedy. he was interviewed at a press conference later that day and he uttered these words that I will never forget.

He said I changed my life. I changed my mind and I saved my life. I changed my mind and I saved my life.

[19:06] He changed his mind about taking this particular flight and in so doing he actually saved his own life. And it got me thinking I thought, you know, it's the same with Jesus.

If you're refusing Jesus' offer of love and forgiveness, you need to change your mind and accept what he offers you. And in doing that, you'll save your life.

Change your mind and save your life. You see, we all have to make a decision about Jesus and God helps us with this decision. We don't have to make this decision on our own.

We need to decide whether we are for Jesus or whether we are against him. You can't sit on the fence. You can't be neutral. Let me perhaps illustrate this by telling you about our cat.

My wife and I have a black cat and his name is Sooty. And he's a great companion and he's a constant source of amusement. investment. And here he is.

[20:11] Now he was a bit unhappy coming here. Are you okay? He's not okay. We don't expect him to last very long. Hello. How are you? He's freaking out so we might leave Sooty back in the vestry I think.

By the way, that's my wife. That's not the cat. He can be pretty frustrating at times. For example, he loves being outside and exploring our garden.

He just adores being outside and being adventurous and digging holes and doing all sorts of things. But we keep his bowl of food inside because the possums get to it or the ants just crawl in it and just mess it up.

So we keep the food inside but he loves being outside. So he knows if he wants to eat, he's got to come inside. And Olive and I are always happy to open the door for him.

And sometimes though he'll be outside and he'll come to the door and you sort of look at him and think, I think he's hungry. And you open the door for him and he just sits there.

[21:17] He just sits there and just looks at you. And here I am holding the door open, just waiting patiently and I can tell from his face he wants to come in and eat. But he just sits there.

Because the lure of the outdoors is just too much. He wants to be playing. And he's trying to work at shall I stay outside and play or I am a bit hungry. He just sits there, he just can't make up his mind. So he has a decision to make. Do I go in and eat and just forsake being outside for a couple of minutes and we'll let him out again as soon as he's finished eating or do I stay outside and stay hungry?

to be honest, after a while I've had enough and I just closed the door. But by not making a decision he's actually made a decision.

By not making a decision he's actually made a decision, a decision to stay outside. It's the same with Jesus. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel chapter 12 verse 30.

[22 : 22] He says whoever is not with me is against me. Whoever is not with me is against me. Jesus is saying we can't be neutral about him.

We either decide to follow him in our lives or we reject him. We can't do neither. If you say well no I'm not going to make a decision about Jesus just yet.

we're actually choosing to reject him. Like the cat. His decision to not make a decision is a decision because he stays outside.

Now of course a decision to follow Jesus is an important decision. It's the biggest decision anyone could make in their lives. And you need to think carefully about what that involves. Even Jesus himself exhorts us to count the cost before following him.

And you may need time to consider such an important decision. I'm not denying that at all. But if you're just procrastinating and putting off this decision because you can't be bothered addressing it you are really rejecting Jesus.

[23 : 34] Jesus said whoever is not with me is against me. The consequences of rejecting Jesus are disastrous. We remain unforgiven and cut off from God.

Separated from him and his people. The consequences of following Jesus are wonderfully good. We're forgiven. We become God's children. We have a certain hope of an eternal future with him. We know we're going to be in heaven with him and part of his people on earth, the church. By saying these things I'm only outlining to us what God teaches us in the Bible. It's a decision we all must consider.

I certainly don't say these things to manipulate anyone to follow Jesus but I would be irresponsible if I didn't tell you what the Bible teaches about the consequences of accepting Jesus or rejecting him. I just have to allude you to the fact that there is a decision that you have to make in your life. As we finish let me just paraphrase another verse in the Bible by saying that God is making his appeal to you through us on behalf of Christ.

[24 : 44] Be reconciled to God. Don't run away from him. 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 not try and get caught up too much in the commercial hoo-ha of the season. Remember what it's all about. And so this is Christmas.

God's gift of his saviour son to us. God's gift of Jesus. As the carol says come let us adore him Christ our Lord.