

Getting Ready for Christmas

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Date: 07 December 2003

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 7th of December 2003. The preacher is Andy Pradeau.

His sermon is entitled Getting Ready for Christmas and is based on Matthew chapter 1 verses 18 to 25.

So everyone's got to be happy. Frankly, who wouldn't want to buy a Phillips nose hair trimmer for only \$19.95? What a bargain!

And during this Christmas period, you might also find your local councils, shopping centres and maybe even your next door neighbour begin to decorate their houses, streets and shops to celebrate this festival.

In fact, there's this family that lives down my street and they spend thousands of dollars on decorations. They would have fairy lights everywhere, a Santa Claus or two and maybe some reindeers and a Santa Claus workshop just to top things up.

[1 : 12] And apparently, their electricity bill was about \$500 just for that month. But despite the cost, it didn't concern them one little bit.

As long as their decorations brought joy to the people who pass their house every day, it would be all worth it. My family prepares Christmas quite differently.

When I was in my teenage years, my dad would get me or my older brother to go to the garage to get the Christmas tree. And we wouldn't get the Christmas tree to set it up and assemble it and decorate it together as a whole family and it would be all really nice.

But rather, all I had to do was go to the garage, grab the Christmas tree out of the box and it would be fully assembled with last year's decorations still on it. The theory was that it saved time.

And personally, I thought it was brilliant. It was efficient, easy and quick. So is this what Christmas is all about? Decorations, shopping, Christmas trees and maybe even the exchange of gifts.

[2 : 28] Now I'm not saying you or your family do any of these things. But my question to you is, how are you preparing for Christmas? How have you been getting ready for Christmas this year?

In fact, why do you even bother with Christmas at all? What is the special occasion that it demands everyone's attention? And it's not just in Australia, it's throughout the world.

Well, what we're going to be doing today is go back to the first Christmas and find out what it's all about. Hopefully from this, we'll be better equipped to prepare for Christmas for all the right reasons.

So to begin, why don't I read the passage to you out again? And please remember, this is from Matthew's Gospel, which is one of the biographies we have of Jesus' life.

And we find this in the Bible. It was written around the time of his life. And as I read it today, see if you can work out who Jesus is.

[3 : 37] You can follow with me if you have your Bibles open. Verse 18. Now the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet.

Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means God is with us. When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

He took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had born a son, and he named him Jesus. So what you've got is a lady called Mary and a guy named Joseph.

[5 : 00] These people were about to get married. And what happened was that Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant. He thought that Mary had been unfaithful, and so in all good conscience, he didn't want to marry her anymore.

So he sought to break off their marriage quietly, and he wanted to break off their marriage quietly because he was a compassionate man and didn't want to publicly humiliate Mary.

But what happened was that there was a dream, and an angel of the Lord or a messenger from God appeared to him. The angel told Joseph that it was okay to take Mary home as his wife because she hasn't been unfaithful.

So Joseph actually decides to listen to God and obeys. Now that's a great thing to do, isn't it? So he takes Mary home to be his wife and didn't have any sexual union with her until she gave birth to a son.

And he names him Jesus because that is what God told him to do. Hmm. Jesus is no ordinary baby, is he? So who is this Jesus?

[6 : 13] And why do we still celebrate his birthday to this very day? Who do you think he is? Did you pick up any points when I read the passage out to you before?

Was he just an ordinary baby? Or maybe a baby that was born into a family with really weird problems? Or a dad whose name is Joseph?

Or a dad who dreamed weird things? Well, what have other people said in the past? Some say that Jesus was a spiritual leader who founded the Christian faith.

Well, there are others who say that Jesus was just a good bloke who wanted to help people out. He wanted to heal people of their diseases and that was all there was. Others say that he was a good teacher.

And people still think that he was just a nice bloke. Kind of like Ned Flanders from The Simpsons.

Well, why don't we take a closer look and discover for ourselves who Jesus is and look at what the angel told us about him.

[7 : 27] Let's start at verse 20. So please have your Bibles open if you do have them. That'd be great. So the angel says, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

So what do we learn about this guy? One obvious observation is that Mary is physically pregnant with Jesus. And we can find out in verse 25 that Mary actually gives birth to Jesus.

But do you know there's anything else about him? His dad's Joseph, isn't it? Who is the son of David. But what does that mean?

Well, if you look at the start of the book of Matthew, you'll find a genealogy. To us, it seems boring. It's kind of like a list of addresses and names found in a phone book.

But you see, genealogies were really important to the Jews because it established for them their identity and their heritage. And so in this case, through this genealogy, we find out that Jesus is from the line of King David.

[8 : 44] This means that Jesus was born into a royal family. So as King David was king over Israel, Jesus will also be king over Israel.

But from another book in the Bible called Philippians, we find out that Jesus is not just the king over Israel, but in fact, he is the king of the entire world. It says that he is king over everything in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

This is why we normally call Jesus, Jesus Christ. And we can see that Matthew does this as well in verse 18.

In the translation that you have, it says Jesus the Messiah, but that's just a Hebrew way of saying Christ, which is the Greek version. And this word means the anointed one.

And it's a word used by God to tell us who he has chosen to be king. So the word Christ next to Jesus' name actually describes who Jesus is.

[9 : 48] Kind of like a professor or doctor, the title describes who they are. So the first thing that we find out about who Jesus is is that he's a king.

But more importantly, and at a much more fundamental level, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit or God.

This means that Mary's pregnancy was the direct action of God. It was God who put Jesus into Mary's womb.

Jesus is God's son. That is, Jesus is God. This is why we call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. And you can see this in verse 23.

But we'll have a look at this later. So this answers our previous question, doesn't it? Who is Jesus? Well, he's a king and he is also God.

[10:48] He is fully man and fully God. 100% man and 100% God. But why did Jesus come?

Why did he choose to enter his own creation? Well, the angel explains this to Joseph in verse 21. Have a look at it with me.

Verse 21. She, that is Mary, will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. So the angel told Joseph to name the child Jesus.

And this name actually describes why he came. And that is to save his people from their sins. But who are his people?

Does it include us? Well, for Joseph, these people would have been the Jews, the Israelites. But if we read through the whole book of Matthew, we find out that it is actually much broader than this.

[11:56] We find glimpses of Jesus speaking about Gentiles, that is non-Jews, becoming part of the kingdom of God. This is especially vivid in the last chapter of the book, chapter 28.

And it says how Jesus commands his disciples to make followers of every nation. So his people actually refers to everyone.

This means that Jesus came to save everyone from their sins. So no matter whether you're Australian, American, Chinese, Spanish, Maltese, or maybe even from an island called Tasmania, Jesus came to save you from your sins.

But wait, what are sins? And why do we need to be saved from it? Well, we normally think of sin as the bad things we do, don't we?

Kind of like if you kill someone, or you rob a bank, you burn someone's houses down, or that you cook your best friend's dog. Then that's a sin. But the Bible gives us a totally different picture of what sin is.

[13:13] You see, sin isn't just something bad you do. It isn't just a moral problem. More fundamentally, sin is actually a relationship problem that we have with God.

You see, God created us to run the world His way. But what we did in our arrogance instead was to reject Him as the ruler and God of this universe, and decided to run the world our own way.

And if this is not enough, we continue to do bad things to make Him even angrier. So we have actually stuffed up God's world.

Our rejection of God as the ruler and Lord of this world is what sin is fundamentally. And we have all committed this crime.

As a result, God will punish us. And the punishment for this is death. Eternal death. You see, we die not because we become too wrinkly, or that the system inside us becomes so old that it just collapses.

[14:25] We die because we have all rejected the source of life. And that is God. So by rejecting God, we have rejected life.

And the result of this is eternal death. So why did Jesus come? Well, He came to save all of us for our rebellion and rejection of God.

He came to rescue us from eternal death, condemnation, and punishment. But how did He do it? How did He fix our relationship problem with God?

What did He do that can make us right with God again? Again, from the book of Matthew, we find out that Jesus lives a life in total submission to God.

You see, He didn't reject God like us. He didn't rebel against God in any way. But rather, He lived a life under God's rule.

[15:27] He always did what God told Him to do. In fact, He lived the life that we were meant to live. And that was without sin.

As a result, He doesn't deserve eternal death or punishment. But close to the end of the book of Matthew, Jesus does in fact die.

But if He doesn't deserve death and punishment, then why did He die? How unfair? Well, the reason is simple.

Jesus died to be our substitute. As we have a human problem, Jesus came as a human to perfectly take our place in death.

What a perfect substitute. Human for human. But of course, Jesus is the sinless whereas we are the sinful. As a result, He took our place in death to absolve our punishment from God for our rebellion against God.

[16:34] He flawlessly paid the debt that we were meant to pay. But that's not all. Because Jesus is God and He did not deserve death, God raised Him back to life again to once again be the ruler and king of this universe.

And He will one day return to judge everyone and that includes all of us. So if we trust and believe that Jesus has taken our place in death, then though we may still die physically, we have to hope that God will no longer hold the sin against us.

And so we will also be raised back to life to live eternally with God forever. And this is instead of eternal death and punishment.

Isn't that just fantastic? But did all of this just happen by chance? Was it a mere accident that Jesus accidentally took our place instead of us?

Well, why don't we have a look at the rest of what the angel told Joseph in verses 22 and 23 to find out. Verse 22. All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet.

[17:59] Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means God is with us. Well, quite clearly from this passage, Jesus' birth was no accident.

God, through the prophets, or in other words, the people through whom God spoke his word, had planned for Jesus to come right from the beginning.

In fact, in this passage, the angel is actually quoting a prophet who lived about 700 years prior to the life of Jesus and his name was Isaiah. And he said that he, that is Jesus, he said, that is Isaiah said, that a virgin will give birth to a child and people will call him Emmanuel.

And we find out that this means God is with us. And Emmanuel isn't just a name that we will call Jesus, but in fact, it is a description and an indication of his role as the person who will bring God's presence into creation.

But what does God is with us mean? Well, Jesus' birth meant that God is with us. Then it clearly means that Jesus is God.

[19:21] But we've had a look at this already. So, what we're now concerned with are its implications. What does it mean for all of humanity if God is with us?

Well, it could mean two things. Firstly, it could mean salvation. Before, we worked out that Jesus came to save his people from their sins and that whoever trusts that Jesus has paid the punishment that they deserve, then God is with us for them would mean salvation, hope of eternal life.

However, for the rest of those who will continue to reject God and Jesus or who will not make a decision to recognize him and accept and acknowledge that Jesus has died on the cross and risen from the dead to save us, then God is with us for them would mean judgment.

to be rightfully judged by God with eternal death and punishment for the sins that we have committed against him. It's kind of like when there's a war on.

The brute fact of any war is that there will be a winner and you can't deny this. Someone is liberated and someone is defeated. Why don't we use World War II as an example.

[20:48] It's a good example because everyone was involved and everyone was affected. So you were either with the allies or not and when America went to war against Japan, Germany and Italy after the incident in Pearl Harbor, for some such as Britain and Australia, it meant hope.

The hope of finally being able to see that there could possibly be peace. peace in the world. But for others such as Adolf Hitler, Mussolini and the Emperor of Japan, it meant destruction, death, despair.

Well, at least that's what the Americans would like to think. But the point is clear, isn't it? An event could mean different things for different people and it's the same with Jesus' birth, salvation or judgment.

There is no middle ground. You can't sit on the fence. Even IBM, who we would have thought was a neutral party during World War II, was convicted in the last decade for their contribution to the destruction of the Jews.

And the reason was because the Nazis got IBM to set up computer systems and programs to work out who were the Jews. and as a result of this information, they would use it and send these people

to the gas chambers.

[22 : 21] So even a company like IBM, who we would have thought was neutral, wasn't. They did take a side, didn't they? There is no middle ground.

It can only be one or the other, salvation or judgment. So how are you going to respond? Are you going to accept Jesus' free gift of salvation?

Are you going to continue to reject him and reject life? Do you really want to face his judgment? If you don't let Jesus take the punishment for you, then you just have to do it yourself.

So make a decision between life and death today. Choose life. By ignoring and not answering this question, you will be continuing to put God off.

So stop rejecting the ruler, the king, and the savior of this universe. Make a decision today. Let God with us mean salvation for you today, instead of judgment.

[23 : 32] Christmas is a great time of the year. And Christmas decorations are fantastic.

Presents are great too, and I really like them. But I guess the problem arises when these become so much as a part of Christmas that they become a distraction to what Christmas is all about.

It's like preparing a surprise party for your friend. And when your friend rocks up, you totally ignore him. In fact, everyone totally ignores him. Just like the play before.

She was preparing for Christmas, and she was so caught up into preparing her presents to send them off in time that she totally forgot about Jesus, or just totally ignored him anyway.

We could be so easily caught up in preparing for Christmas that we could forget what Christmas is all about. So I hope I have somehow made it clear that Christmas isn't just about decorations, but it's really about Jesus.

[24 : 42] I'm sorry to break the news to most of you lovely people, but Christmas is not about whether you get the presents of your dreams, or whether you've been bad or good so that Santa Claus will climb down your chimney.

But it's about Jesus. It's about God being with us. It's about the hope that we can have in Jesus' birth, because that brought about his death and resurrection, and as a result of that, it can bring us life with him for eternity.

So how are you going to prepare for Christmas now? If you're a person who has put your trust in Jesus' death and resurrection, then are you thinking about how you can bring glory to God by thinking hard about how you can spread his news, his good news, to those who do not know it yet? The great news that he brought with us, for us, 2,000 years ago. Are you remembering what Christ achieved in his death and resurrection?

Christ's death and resurrection? So that you can re-examine how you're living your life. Christmas is a great time to re-examine how we're living for Jesus, because given all the distractions we have, we can work out whether Jesus is really the center of our life in everything that we do.

[26 : 08] if you're not a person who has put your trust in Christ's death and resurrection, then how are you preparing for Christmas?

Are you caught up in the advertising and discounts at Maya and David Jones? Why not make this year a special year by taking Christmas more seriously and consider celebrating it for all the right reasons?

I encourage you to check out who Jesus is and decide whether Jesus has brought you salvation or judgment. Make the decision for yourself today.

Choose life and make your preparations for Christmas this year a preparation for your entire life, for all of eternity, with Jesus as the Lord and Savior.

For those who want to receive this gift of salvation today, I'm going to pray a prayer. And what it basically says is that we admit that we have rejected God and we now understand who Jesus is.

[27 : 18] As a result, we want to accept this free gift of salvation, made possible only by his death and resurrection. We will then endeavor to live a life to please God rather than ourselves.

miracles. It simply goes like this. We'll have it up there. Dear God, I am sorry I have rejected and rebelled against you.

I now know that Jesus is both King and God and that he came to save me. Thank you for the free gift of salvation, made possible only by Jesus' death and resurrection.

Please help me now to live for Jesus as my King as a response to what he has already done for me. In Jesus' name, amen. So that's the prayer that I'm going to pray now and I'll do it a lot slower so that you can reiterate it in your own mind to God.

So why don't we pray together now? Dear God, I am sorry I have rejected and rebelled against you. [28 : 26] I now know that Jesus is both King and God and that he came to save me. thank you for the free gift of salvation made possible only by Jesus' death and resurrection.

Please help me now to live for Jesus as my King as a response to what he has already done for me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen.