

Why Did Jesus Come?

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: 04 December 2005

Preacher: Rod McArdle

[0 : 0 0] Have you noticed that Shane Warne's bowling performances have improved significantly since his treatment for hair loss? It's true.

This is a statistically reliable fact. On Tuesday, I picked up the Herald Sun to read about Warne's latest cricketing exploits. He'd just taken 6 for 80 off 33 overs against the West Indies.

And I was interested in reading the post-match analysis by the cricket commentators seeking to get to the root of this improved performance. Well, as I was flicking that periodical sort of picture book, I think newspaper I mean, a feature article stood out.

It tends to stand out in the Herald Sun and it was entitled Christmas is about giving. And the journalist by the name of Robin Riley commented on the lack of Christmas spirit in 2005.

She said, there's been so much horror from the earthquakes, floods and famines and the usual man-made mayhem caused by war and terrorism. You'd think we'd welcome the distraction that Christmas brings.

[1 : 0 6] She continues, that's not to say that we forget those still suffering, but I think we need some respite, a selse of sorts to a year of so much pain. Now, the journalist realises that retail therapy itself won't be sufficient for this.

No, in fact, she says, to ease the pain of the world, we need all of the trimmings, the tree, the decorations, the lights, being nicer to each other than we've been in the past.

Maybe digging a little deeper for causes that matter. She says, Christmas is about giving, whether that be gifts, affection or to charity. It's the time of year when many of us feel in a more generous mood.

She went on and she identified what she believed to be the main reason for getting off the right track of Christmas. And she identified that as one of belief. So as I was reading this article at this stage, I was encouraged that this is an issue with belief.

But I was encouraged for just a short moment because her view of belief is a very postmodern view. She explains, she says, I read this week that Paris Hilton believed in Father Christmas until she was 17 years old.

[2 : 1 9] At first I was tempted to scoff at this, but I realised that was actually a wonderful gift to be able to believe for so long. You see, for the journalist, the solution for this Christmas is straightforward.

She simply says, no matter what our religious heritage, what our religious leanings, we should just celebrate Christmas. I want us tonight to look at the account of the first Christmases told by the doctor and the historian Luke.

And perhaps it will shed some light on whether this Herald Sun journalist has captured the meaning of Christmas. So I'd like, if you would, to turn to Luke 2, page 832, as we look at this well-known story again.

Luke opens the chapter with these words. In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

All went to their own towns to be registered. And he goes on and he describes Jesus' birth. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.

[3 : 32] He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver a child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

You know, just here in this city of Melbourne, at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, about 500 babies are born every month. If you're into stats, like Warnie's stats or just like statistics, you can go to the Royal Women's Hospital website and it'll give you all of those details on the babies.

500 a month. So, when you think of that, could the arrival of just one baby in some backwater town in the Middle East really be so significant for you, so significant for me, indeed, so significant for the whole world?

You see, Luke, in just these very few verses, describes an utterly unique event, an event with cosmic and eternal consequences.

In obedience to the census of Caesar Augustus, Joseph goes from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be enrolled. He goes there because he's a descendant of David. And he takes Mary along with him, and it was a journey that probably took five, maybe six days.

[4 : 57] I want you just to look back in chapter one and remind ourselves of what the angel Gabriel said to Mary. Chapter one, verse 26. We read, But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

The angel said to her, You see, The angel Gabriel is not just giving Mary some incidental information about this birth.

This is the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. This is the sonship promise of the Old Testament, spoken about a son of David, that God would be his father.

And we can read that in 2 Samuel chapter 7. This son of the Most High will establish a kingdom, and this kingdom will never end. This, when you think about it, is just an amazing revelation, isn't it?

To Mary. No woman had ever been told this before by God. No woman since Mary will ever be told this.

[6 : 42] And this king of an everlasting kingdom is born in the most simple way. You see, the building that's described there in verse 7 was in fact an enclosure of walls into which cattle were driven at night.

So this king of an everlasting kingdom was born in fact in an animal feeding trough. The dignity of this event of cosmic and eternal consequences, it's not the surroundings.

The dignity of the event is the little baby in the feeding trough. And I want us then to look a little closer at the significance of this event, this first Christmas.

In the Roman world, of course, Mary's child was born in the lowest of low standards. But if you look at verse 9, we get the right perspective, we get the heavenly perspective.

An angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds. And with this majestic messenger of God came the bright presence of the Lord's glory and surrounded the shepherds.

[7 : 48] And we know time and time again in scripture that when sinful, fallen humanity is confronted by the blazing holy presence of God, they're simply terrified.

And Luke records that the shepherds were literally filled with fear. But God in his graciousness, he brings a word of comfort.

He brings a word of comfort by his angel. Look at verse 10. The angel said to them, do not be afraid. You see, God is not some remote despot.

God desires to interact with his creation. And notice also in verse 10 that this announcement contains two descriptions. It's good news.

And the response to this good news will be great joy. Now, the reason the message is good news and a cause for great joy is actually very explicit in the original Greek.

[8 : 47] Verse 11 is directly connected into verse 10. And it's connected by a small but important word that we just simply would translate as because. So it reads something like this.

Don't be afraid. I'm bringing you good news of great joy for all people because today in the city of David, a savior has been born to you all who is the Christ, the Lord.

That's what the shepherds were told. And back in Matthew 1, we read that an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph 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're to name him Jesus. Why? For he will save his people from their sins. This week at RE, Religious Instruction, at a local school, I was encouraging the kids from grade five and six in a combined class to think about, in fact, the topic of our message tonight, why Jesus came.

And we were reading, in fact, this passage from Luke chapter two. And in this class of about 35, grade five and grade sixes, three of the kids called out. They said, Jesus came so that we could go to heaven.

[10 : 06] Hmm. I sort of said to him, well, is that what Luke says? Well, in verse 11, it says that a savior's been born. And, well, to go to heaven, Jesus needed to die for our sin.

And that's why he's called our savior. Fantastic. It was a great answer, wasn't it? That's what the coming of God in human flesh is about.

That's what Christmas is actually about. Friends, this RE class is like a microcosm of society.

Some of the kids are disinterested in the gospel. Some are outright scoffers. And a number drink up the message of what God has done magnificently in the person of Jesus Christ.

And they drink it up like thirsty runners stopping at a Gatorade feeding drinking station. The coming of God in human flesh, and we could maybe just use that as one term, the incarnation, is intimately related to the perfect substitutionary death of Christ on the cross.

[11 : 20] And we could just simply sum that up as the atonement. The first Christmas is intimately related to Easter. The birth of Bethlehem is intimately related to the cross.

Often when the birth of Jesus is spoken about, the emphasis is on God's presence with us. And of course, that's true. God is present with us. The birth of Jesus is certainly God's presence in a very physical sense, isn't it?

Dwelling with mankind. But it's a great mystery. The coming of God in human flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth is one of the central mysteries of the Christian faith.

We're dealing with formless, bodiless, omniscient, that is all-knowing, omnipresent, present everywhere, omnipotent, all-powerful, spirit, and finite, touchable, physical, time-bound creatures.

For one to become the other inevitably binds you up in mysteries, doesn't it? The intricacies of the first Christmas are beyond our comprehension. But the reality of the first Christmas is historical fact.

[12 : 41] And the purpose of the first Christmas is clearly revealed in Scripture. The second person of the Trinity took on human flesh, took on human flesh to be our saviour.

The function, of course, of a saviour is to deliver, to rescue from peril. And that's quite basic, isn't it, when we think about that. And yet, the world at large rejects the real meaning of Christmas.

The article in the Herald Sun was entitled Christmas is about giving. And on the surface, that's actually not too bad a summary statement. But the critical issue is what is being given?

See, it's the content which is all important. Tree decorations, lights, presents, being nice to one another, none of that will save the human race.

And I'm not surprised that as the journalist reflects back on 2005, that she feels somewhat overwhelmed by natural disasters, by human wickedness.

[13 : 54] The upheavals in the natural order and the inhumanity of people to one another have one thing in common. One thing in common and it's sin.

When our first parents rebelled against God, all of creation fell. And this natural order in which we live will continue to be unstable until the Lord Jesus returns and brings in the new order, a new heaven and a new earth.

earth. But men and women seeking to live independently of God have the opportunity today, this day, this night, to cease their rebellion, to accept God's free gift of salvation, to trust in Christ and as the Bible said, to be transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

I hope you agree that that's worth celebrating because starting from about now there seems to be never-ending celebrations all the way through to the new year.

I reckon celebrations are great, they're good to be part of, but when God is excluded then the celebrations are simply idolatry. Friends, without Christ as our saviour, God explains so explicitly in his authoritative word, the Bible, that we are dead in our transgressions and sins, totally out of fellowship with him.

[15 : 25] There's a state, in fact, of hostility between us and God. But the glory of the gospel, the glory of the good news is seen in that verse that Paul records in Romans 5.

God proves his love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And in order to die for us, Christ had to be one of us.

Last week in the international press, a report was carried of a young British girl who asked her mother, Mummy, why did Mary and Joseph name their little baby after a swear word?

It's tragic, isn't it? Life in post-Christian Western world. Why did Mary and Joseph name their little baby after a swear word?

I mean, what an extraordinary responsibility for each follower of the Lord Jesus to be heralds of the good news of great joy for all people. The Saviour has come, he's died for our sin, he's risen from the dead, and he's ascended to heaven.

[16 : 36] And he's coming back. At the Los Angeles International Airport, a large suitcase, unmarked and unclaimed, was discovered.

When the US custom agents opened the case, they found the curled up body of an unidentified young woman. She'd been dead for a few days, according to the county coroner.

And as the investigation continued, it was learned in fact that the woman was the wife of a young Iranian living in the US. Unable to obtain a visa to enter the US and to join a husband, she took matters into her own hand and attempted to smuggle herself into America via an airplane's cargo bay.

While her plan seemed simple, though risky, officials were hard-pressed to understand how such an attempt could ever succeed. You see, even if she had survived the journey in the cargo bay, she would remain an illegal alien, having entered through improper channels.

And some people believe that they'll enter the kingdom of God on their own, since they're reasonably good citizens, perhaps church attenders, perhaps even being really nice at Christmas time.

[17 : 55] But entry plans of our own design prove not only foolish, but they prove to be fatal. friends, be sure you're lined up with God's entry plan to his kingdom.

Perhaps you've come to the service tonight and you still have a question in your mind as to who Jesus is. See, as we read the accounts of Jesus' life in the Gospels, we see that he's a teacher, we see that he's a healer, a miracle worker, an exorcist, indeed a great moral example.

And all of that is true. He's all of that. But you don't need a death and resurrection to be a teacher, a healer, a miracle worker, an exorcist, a great moral example.

You need a death and a resurrection to save people. The grand purpose of the first Christmas, of God coming in human flesh, was Jesus dying on a cross for our sin, paying the price we couldn't pay as our substitute, reconciling us to our creator as we put our faith and trust in him.

You see, Christmas is indeed about giving, but it's much more than giving presents and bright lights and trying to be nice to one another. In the fourth gospel, John clearly states the real nature of that Christmas gift.

[19 : 28] You know the verse well, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Jesus is indeed a teacher, a healer, a miracle worker, someone who can drive out demons, certainly a great moral example, but he's more than that.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep and then takes it up again.

God declares in Scripture that there's only in fact one way of salvation. The Herald Sun journalist says don't worry about your particular beliefs, just believe.

But over and over again God declares in Scripture that there's only one way of salvation. And let me just simply put it to you, how could it not be? You see, God himself became man to die for sinners.

[20 : 39] Sinners like me, sinners like you. In speaking to this group tonight I know that the vast majority listening to these words have known the reality of Jesus as their saviour, in some cases for many, many years.

I want to encourage you tonight not to lose the magnificence of what we celebrate at Christmas. God came in the person of Jesus of Nazareth to save you, to die for you.

And as Christians we should respond just as the shepherds responded. Look at verse 20. We read they glorified and praised God. That's what our whole lives are to be focused on.

And one of the ways that we can glorify God is to reflect his mission character. Note verse 17, the shepherds spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.

In fact, someone has called the shepherds the first evangelists. And each follower of the Lord Jesus needs to be a promoter of the gospel, of the good news.

[21 : 51] And friends, Christmas presents so many opportunities for us, doesn't it, to be promoters of the gospel. Just as I thought about activities that are coming up in this church.

Opportunities are so many. We can invite a friend to the carol service on the 18th. We can invite a next door neighbour, maybe a work or a school colleague to one of the services either on Christmas Eve or in fact on Christmas Day.

We can bring a friend to the youth beach at night this coming Friday night. We can bring a friend to the young adults barbecue on Saturday night. Let's be keen, active and prayerful as we seek opportunities to share with the world around us this Christmas that the Saviour, the Christ, Christ, the Davidic King, the one who will reign forever, the Lord, the sovereign Lord, the sovereign King has come.

The Lord Jesus Christ has come to deal with sin. Nearly 2,000 years ago in the city of David, a Saviour was born.

He lived a perfect life. He died for you on the cross and then he rose again three days later. He is Christ the Lord. So as we head into December, as we head into this Advent season, we remember when God came to us in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

[23 : 23] We look with expectation towards the time when Jesus Christ will return. And the announcement by the angel to the shepherds was accompanied by God's glory.

glory. And there will again be a time of blazing glory when the Lord Jesus Christ returns. You can count on it. He will return at the end of this age.

And the writer of the Hebrews, I think just in a couple of verses, wonderfully condenses the first Christmas, the death of Christ and his return. Hear these words.

Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin. How? By the sacrifice of himself. And just as it's appointed for mortals to die once and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time.

Not to deal with sin, but to save those who eagerly wait for him. Christmas is about giving. It's about the ultimate present.

[24 : 35] God has given himself for us. So let's glorify the Lord. Let's spread his word. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Amen.