

Sunday 22nd December 2024 - Advent: It's Not Christmas... Yet!

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Date: 22 December 2024

Preacher: Dave Moss

[0 : 00] Good morning. Morning, Phil. Sorry, old youth group. Yeah, yeah, you can heckle and there'll be trouble after you.

That's fine. I'd just like to say it is not Christmas. Okay? I'd just like to say happy Advent to you. You can call me Scrooge if you must, but it's just not Christmas.

Yeah? Many people seem to think it is. But by my reckoning, it's not happened yet. Yeah? It's not even Christmas Eve.

All right? Yet. In fact, yesterday was the winter solstice, the day of the year when the shortest daylight hours.

That was yesterday. And from today onwards, well, it's official. There'll be more daylight each day as the nights grow shorter. And it's definitely official.

[1 : 06] Sun's out. It's nearly summer. And I can hear you laughing. And now you're quite convinced I've completely lost my senses.

But it's precisely this kind of thinking that is all over the media and causing us much confusion these days.

So, for instance, on Sunday, the 10th of November, I attended the Remembrance Sunday service at the Cenotaph here outside church.

And that's our custom in this country. But that very same evening, I took the dog for a walk and witnessed fireworks going off.

And at two houses just around the corner from us, there were Christmas lights on full display. So, talk about confusing. Which day was it?

[2 : 03] Was it Remembrance Sunday? Was it bonfire night? Or was it Christmas? I've never known Christmas lights and decorations go up as early as they have this year.

And many, many households have been doing it. One person said to me, I can't believe it's nearly Christmas. I'm just not ready. And my reply was, Can I remind you, it's the 24th of November.

And Christmas is not until the 25th of December. It's just over a month away. This is what I find fascinating about what's happening in our society.

As we're witnessing a huge cultural shift in national thinking. It's largely driven by the commercial version of Christmas.

And shops start it forever earlier in an effort to get us to buy more things. Only yesterday, I saw the Easter eggs in the shop. So, talk about confusing.

[3 : 11] So, this commercial version of Christmas is there. That's what's out there. But apart from that, I do get it. I do get it. People are desperate for something cheerful.

A brighter outlook for a change. So, the Christmas lights go up. And I get it. But nonetheless, this cultural shift is very significant for us as a society.

This is what you often hear about Christmas. And it's shifted dramatically in its outlook over the past 20 years.

And it's become, let's praise God for the commercial retail festival commonly known as Christmas. And that applies, unfortunately, to many church settings too.

And here's some quotes of what people think Christmas is all about. Christmas is for the children. Christmas is a time for family and friends.

[4 : 14] Christmas isn't a season. It's a feeling. Believe in the magic of Christmas. Collect moments, not things.

Christmas is forever, not just one day. And Christmas is doing a little extra for someone. And this isn't all meaningless rubbish.

In fact, it's all very true. It's all really good stuff. But something is missing. Something very significant is missing. So, let's have a quiz, should we?

And discover if you can see what's missing. There you go. What's missing? Have a little think. Chat to Nae. But what do you think's missing from this quiz?

What do you think's missing? Christ? Is there some suggestions? Any others? No? Oh, right.

[5 : 13] I am surprised. I'm really surprised. Actually, the first one is cinemas. Because surely you go to the cinema or indeed to the theatre or pantomime at Christmas time, don't you?

It's what it's all about, isn't it? That's what it's all about. And the second one is vegetarian. Because Christmas is about the food, isn't it?

It's about the food, isn't it? And we all know about the legendary nut roast now, don't we? That's what it's about. And then, of course, Pringle. Where would be we without a Pringle at Christmas, eh?

You can't have a Christmas party without two by two Pringles, can you? And what else have we got? Well, gopher. Somebody has to do all the hard work at Christmas.

It doesn't happen all by itself, does it? Now, perhaps it's you that's the gopher running here, there, and everywhere. And what else do we have? Well, it's overly sickening.

[6 : 17] Because that's what you feel afterwards. You've had too much to eat and the excessive food and drink. It's all part of the season. So, what else?

Well, by Christmas Day, late afternoon, when half the relatives are asleep, well, the boredom sets in. And you say, I know, should we go to the boxing day sales tomorrow?

That's what Christmas is all about, isn't it? No. Oh. Well, I did hear some of you more spiritually minded saying that you thought Christ was missing from Christmas.

And the answer should look something like this. The Christingle is an orange with a lit candle in it. It's a German tradition representing Jesus coming as light of the world.

Christening is when Mary and Joseph named the baby Jesus, the start of Christendom. And, of course, every family should have a Christopher.

[7 : 23] My family does. And Christopher often gets shortened to Chris. So, that becomes Chris Moss.

And he was often teased at school, how's your father? The term Christ comes from the Greek Christos.

And in early Christianity, it was a title which only gradually became what we tend to think of Jesus' surname today. But Christ is the Greek version of the Hebrew word for Messiah, meaning the Anointed One.

This week, we celebrate the coming of the Anointed One, the Messiah. I don't know how many of you are familiar with the Narnia books by C.S. Lewis.

It's a children's story which has become a much-loved classic. But at the same time, it's the most brilliant allegory which tells us so much about the Christian faith.

[8 : 35] To summarise briefly, four children are evacuated from wartime London and find themselves taken to live in a country house.

They discover a wardrobe with a false back in it, which takes them through to the land of Narnia. Lucy, one of the children, discovers Narnia first.

And this clip I'm about to show you includes one of my favourite quotes from children's literature, which is here on the screen. It is winter in Narnia, said Mr. Tumnus, and has been for ever so long. Always winter, but never Christmas. Mr. Tumnus, if you're not familiar, is half man, half goat. And the Narnia that Lucy discovers is under the cruel rule of the infamous white witch, who has declared that Narnia, in Narnia, that it should be always winter, but never Christmas.

She inflicts the cold and the darkness without the light and joy that Christmas should bring. What are you doing here?

[9 : 49] Well, I was hiding in the wardrobe in the spare room, and... Spare whom? Is that Narnia? Narnia? What's that? Oh, dear girl, you're in it.

Everything from the lamppost all the way to Castle Caer Paravelle on the eastern ocean. Every stick and stone you see, every icicle, is Narnia.

I'm sorry, please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Tumnus. Pleased to meet you, Mr. Tumnus. How would it be if you came and had tea with me?

For you. Are you happy, sir? Oh, thank you very much. Oh. Oh. Ah, ah.

Now that, that is my father. He has a nice face. He looks a lot like you. No. No. No, I'm not very much like him at all, really.

[11:04] My father's fighting the war. My father went away to war, too. But that was a long, long time ago.

Before this dreadful winter. Winter's not all bad. There's ice skating and snowball fights. Oh, and Christmas.

Not here. No. No, we haven't had a Christmas in a hundred years. What? No presents for a hundred years?

Always winter, never Christmas. It's been a long winter. Isn't there anything we can do to help Tumnus? Better take them to the witch's house. And you know what I say?

There's few that go through them gates. They come out again. Fish and chips. But there is hope, dear. Lots of hope.

[12:01] Oh, yeah. There's a right bit more than hope. Aslan is on the move. We think we have Christmas sorted.

The baby Jesus arrives. Great. Done. Lovely story. But the truth is, we've hardly begun to unwrap the present.

The arrival of Jesus simply needs to fit in around our busy Christmas schedule. But when the right time came, God sent his son, born of a woman, subject to the law.

God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. The angel appears to Mary.

Heaven and earth meet in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the promised Messiah who has come.

[13:09] This Messiah has come for the people of the whole world. Jesus is the beginning of a new creation, a new liberation for each and every person, for each and every nation.

Christmas is about God renewing the whole of his creation, which we're all a part of.

God is revealing himself to us in person, in the flesh. The Messiah has come as promised.

God is revealing himself to us in person, in the flesh.

Years really can change. Father Christmas acts as a kind of prophet here to announce that Aslan is on the move. And as it says on the screen, the first appearance of Father Christmas in Narnia in 100 years was the first definite sign that Aslan was on the move.

[14:38] And the power of the long winter was dissolving. It's a very clever scene, also reminding us that the true gifts of Christmas are about using our God-given skills.

Okay, let's have a little watch. Come here, come here.

I hope you've all been good because there's someone here to see you. Merry Christmas, sir.

It certainly is, Lucy, since you have arrived. Look, I've put up with a lot since I got here. But this...

We thought you were the witch. Yes. Sorry about that, but in my defense, I have been driving one of these longer than the witch.

I thought there was no Christmas in Narnia. No. Not for a long time. But the hope that you have brought your majesties is finally starting to weaken the witch's power.

[16:03] Still, I dare say you could do with these. Lust as you...nce. Present! The juice of the fireflower.

One drop will cure any injury.ées Pickering... And though I hope you never have to use it. Thank you, sir. But... I think I could be brave enough.

I'm sure you could. The battle's a ugly affairs. Susan.

Trust in this bow and it will not easily miss. What happened to battles are ugly affairs.

And though you don't seem to have a problem making yourself hurt, blow or miss. And wherever you are, help will come. Thanks.

[17:17] Peter. The time to use these may be near at hand. Thank you, sir.

These are tools. Not toys. Bear them well and wisely. Now, I must be off.

Winter is almost over. Things do pile up and you've been gone a hundred years. Long live Aslan.

And Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas.

Aslan. And Merry Christmas. And Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas. Told you he was real. Aslan is on the move. Aslan is on the move.

After a long, long winter. Aslan the lion is CS Lewis's symbol for Jesus Christ. God is on the move. God is on the move. We live in a country where the cultural shift means that it now seems to be forever Christmas.

[18 : 36] But the coming of the Messiah seems never to be seen or heard. The everlasting winter or the everlasting Christmas season may look pretty, but it simply goes on and on.

But Aslan is on the move. God is at work. The Magi or the wise men visit the Messiah. And in Matthew 2, we read, After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?

We saw his star and it rose and have come to worship him. When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed. And all Jerusalem with him.

When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. In Bethlehem in Judea, they replied.

For this is what the prophet has written. But you, Bethlehem in the land of Judea, are by no means least among the rulers of Judea. For out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

[19 : 53] And later on, when Jesus, as an adult, began his ministry, he asked his disciples, But what about you? Who do you say I am?

And Simon Peter answered, You are the Messiah, the son of the living God. The Messiah has come.

The stars are aligning. The angels appear. Good news is announced. The lowly shepherds are called. The social outcasts are called.

The wise men are called. People from distant lands are called. The Messiah has come. The Messiah has come. God is indeed all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present.

But here, here, we learn God is not who we think he is. God is not who we think he is. God is not over there.

[20 : 54] He's here. God is not detached. He is present in human flesh. God is not far away. He's to be held like a baby.

If we hold Jesus in our arms, we see God's face. God is not who we think he is.

Are we wishing for Santa and not a Messiah? Are we opening our presents and not seeing God's true gifts of love and grace?

Are we enjoying the mince pies but never tasting the real fruit of God working through his spirit?

Have we turned the Christmas lights on but see nothing in the darkness?

God is not the darkness. Today, in the town of David, a savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. The Messiah has come.

[22 : 04] The Messiah for the whole world. Let us, like Mary and Joseph, trust our experience of God and follow to Bethlehem and beyond.

May we know more of God's love and mercy. May we discover the Messiah this Christmas.

That is when Christmas actually comes. Happy Christmas to you all. Christmas. March 17th March.

The world has come together. Pero God and Eve does start a hunger soup GDP.

May we perhaps define Yes, the Messiah reservoir Go from the earth etc. If it occurs in order for orphans who come from power, let us see Taylor ir que statements. It means yes, deftly build in the house. It feels much different.

We have evenavant it. So that this Christmas plant has come together and make A YouTube TCP the same or not most possible the master when it we can expect. The ends. The midnight s name Austral. The NDP ■■■■ Express 1985 Northern Connecticut leaves, now means no wonder there is a literally ■■■■ cop.