

O Come All Ye Faithful

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Date: 24 December 2018

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening, everybody. It's so nice to be here. If you don't know me, my name is Aaron, and I'm one of the ministers on staff here. I'd like to spend just a couple of minutes looking at the passage that we heard up here, Luke chapter 2. It's classic Christmas stuff, right? It's just classic Christmas. You've got the shepherds and baby Jesus, and you've got the manger and the angels and the animals and Mary and Joseph, and I want to talk about that. But as we look at this story, I want to ask you, so we're going to look at the story, we're going to look at it. We're going to look at it. But I want you to do something first that's going to be really difficult. I want you to do this. I want you to try and just forget Christmas.

Just forget about it. Just forget it. Forget about the trees. Forget about pageants. Forget about Christmas cards. Forget about the gifts. Forget about the turkey or the lamb or whatever you're going to eat. Just forget about it. Because what I want to do tonight is I want to talk about history. This event recorded by Luke in the Bible is history. It happened on a specific day.

It happens in a day in history, not a day in some mythological imaginary story. It happens on a day when Caesar Augustus was the emperor of Rome and Quirinius was the governor in Syria, we heard. And it happened in the city, like a real city. It did not happen in Narnia. It didn't happen in Middle Earth. It didn't happen in a galaxy far, far away. It happens in a place called Bethlehem.

It really happens. So forget about Christmas and the sentimentality of Christmas. Let's look at this historical story, remembering the promise that Luke made right at the beginning of the gospel. At the start of the book, he said, my goal here is to write, and in quotes, an orderly account of what actually happened. So let's look at the story then. So we've got Caesar, and he calls for a census. So Mary and Joseph head to Bethlehem, and the census was not like the census we have today, where they're kind of just making sure, trying to work out how many people there are. The direct purpose of the census was tax. They wanted to know how many people they were and who you are so they could tax you. So off they went. Difficult journey, about 90 miles.

They go to Bethlehem, and there's nowhere to stay. So they have to stay in this barn, this stable situation. Then there's a baby is born. And apart from the place, this could have been a fairly normalish sort of birth in the Middle East. A little blip. Baby's born. Slightly unusual place, but just sort of baby's just born. But all of a sudden in the story, we are taken out of the stable and into some fields in the region. And we hear about some shepherds and some angels, and they interpret what's actually happened in this manger. So we have these shepherds, real people.

[3 : 1 8] Real people. The shepherds were not children dressed up in Middle Eastern costumes, right? They were shepherds. And the passage says that an angel visited them and told them something. And in the original language, the word angel, I don't know what you think about angels, but it just means messenger. A messenger from God spoke to these shepherds and tells them that a Savior has been born. And we'll talk about that in a moment, but let's pause for a moment. Remember, we're trying to forget about Christmas. See, when we remember Christmas, we see there's lovely shepherds and it's all really nice and there's sheep and it's all lovely, right? But we forget about Christmas.

See, because we know the story so well, the wrongness, the wrongness of the shepherds is lost in us. See, the Savior has been born and the angels announce it to shepherds. It's not announced to the religious elite. It's not announced to the educated or the influencers. A Savior has been born and God tells low-paid, low-caste shepherds. Back in the days, the shepherds were regarded as fairly unsavory characters for a number of reasons. They worked with animals, which nowadays is cool, but back in the days, that was kind of semi... it's a bit dodgy work. They had to work on the Sabbath, which means they were ceremonially unclean. They couldn't participate in normal religious life. They were not really sort of trusted types. If you had a daughter and the daughter knew her dad and the daughter calls you up and says, Dad, Dad, Dad, I've met a really great guy. He's a really great guy. He's got a fantastic ginger beard and he's just... he's a great guy.

He's a shepherd? So, yeah. See, that would have gone down terribly in those days. These were serious outsiders in this culture and it's to these guys that God announces the birth of a son. Now, why them?

Why did God do this? It's not because God likes a really good underdog story. He doesn't like the underdog narrative like Home Alone or, you know, whatever you're watching this Christmas. No, God is giving us this massive clue about what he's up to. See, God chooses to announce the birth of a son to people of zero status, to people of no status. And by doing that, he's saying, I'm giving you something you can't earn. I'm doing something. I'm going to give you something and you cannot earn it. It's a gift. Now, let's keep going. Let's now look at what the angel said to the shepherds. Fear not, for behold, I bring you news of great joy, for unto us is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord and who will be assigned to you.

You'll find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was an angel, a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace amongst those with whom he is pleased. Goodness, there's so much in there.

[6 : 32] So I just want to zoom in and focus in on two words, just two words. I want to focus in on the word Savior and I want to zoom in on the word peace. But first this word Savior, Savior. For unto us this day in the city of David, a Savior, a Savior is born, Savior. That one word sums up the genius, the genius of Christianity. Every religion offers a path to salvation, offers a path, a way, do this and you'll be saved. Here's the genius of Christianity. It doesn't offer a path to salvation. It offers a Savior. See, Christianity is so different from other faiths. It doesn't say do this and be saved. God says, I will send my son to do what you cannot do, to save you. Because this is what a Savior does.

He saves. See, God is saying, you cannot make yourself good enough to get up to me, so I'm going to come down to you. That's the plan, to save you. This is the genius of Christianity.

That's what's behind the word Savior. Now what about this word peace? On earth, peace among those with whom he is pleased.

Peace. The result of the Savior coming, the result of the salvation, this rescue mission is peace. Peace. That's one of the things God wants to give us through his son is peace.

And it means a lot of stuff. It means peace with God. Peace with God, it means peace in your soul. It means, and peace with God means, means freedom from shame and guilt, freedom from existential hopelessness, freedom from fear.

[8 : 31] Charlie Bounds Christmas. Have you guys seen that? You guys know this movie, right? Charlie Bounds Christmas. It's a classic holiday movie. The basic story is this. Charlie is fed up with the commercialism of Christmas, and he wants to do something about it. So he decides to direct the school play, his primary school play. And of course, it's Charlie Brown, so it all goes horribly wrong. And at the ends of the movie, they're on this, they're on the sort of the stage, their school little stage thing. And you remember this scene, right? And he yells out in frustration, is there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?

Do you remember this? Remember this, right. So enter Linus. Linus is the character who's always sucking his thumb, and he's got a security blanket, his blue security blanket. Linus walks to the center of the stage and reads Luke 1 to 2, just reads it.

Charles Schultz, the creator of Peanuts, he had to really fight to get this included in the movie. This is 1965. He had to fight to keep this in the movie. The producer didn't want it in the movie. The director didn't want it in the movie. They said, it's dangerous. We don't want religion. It's too dangerous to put in this movie. Schultz said it's a deal breaker, so it made it in the movie. Now, if you watch the movie again over Christmas, there's a moment you might miss.

It's easy to miss, and it's very poignant. Watch for the moment when Linus is reading Luke 2, and at the exact moment when Linus quotes the angels and says, fear not, at that exact moment, he drops his blanket to the ground, and he uses both hands to talk. He's never been without his blanket. Fear not drops the blanket to the ground, and it's intentional, of course, and Schultz is reminding us what the angels' words mean, that we cling to so many things for our security, and they're all quite fragile things, and they can be wonderful things in good things, like certain relationships or health, job, money, whatever it is. Linus, quoting Luke, dropping his blanket, is telling us, you won't know peace in your life if it's built on those good but fragile things. If you're hanging on to that blanket for dear life, you won't know peace.

Peace comes through trusting in what Christmas is about, and when you do that, you can let go of some of these securities. So if you believe this is history, you believe a real God sent his real son into this real place at a certain time in history and announce to the world, this is the saviour of the world, has come to give you peace. If you believe that, you can let go of the security blanket.

[11 : 24] You can drop that thing. Let me finish here. I said at the start, we're going to look at the nativity story and try and forget about Christmas for a few minutes and try and block out all the commercial and sort of psychological noise that comes with the season so that we can sort of re-enter the story with regained wonder and gratefulness. And just before I finish up here, the kids sung to us, and we sung with them, O come all ye faithful, with that famous chorus, O come let us adore him.

Why do we sing that? Why are we saying that? Why are we saying we adore you, Jesus? Is it because Jesus is adorable? Sure, he was probably an adorable baby. That's not why we sing it.

We sing it because the events that Luke described really happened. Jesus was born. He is our saviour. He wants to give us peace in this act of sublime grace. Folks, that's why we adore him. Amen. Merry Christmas.