

# Selected Scriptures "The Christmas Story"

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

I'm so excited for Christmas and I hope we get to celebrate with many of you on Christmas Eve. It's one of my very favorite services of the year.

But we've been letting some great Christmas songs point us to biblical truth about the Savior who's born at Christmas this December.

And I've saved my personal favorite for today. Some of you know I love Joy to the World and it contains my favorite line in all Christmas carols.

As hard as it is to compete with the remarkable reality of God and sinners reconciled. That God declares peace in the most horrible war ever and heals our relationship with Him personally.

[ 1 : 10 ] Wow! It's amazing. But I just love that He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found.

You may know Joy to the World was not actually written as a Christmas song. It's based on Psalm 98 and this joyous picture of God's coming with great works of salvation and all the earth rejoicing. People and rivers and hills singing His greatness. Heaven and nature sing. All creation repeats the sounding joy.

It's this huge universal celebration. So the song is pointing us not specifically to one passage, but to the bigger story of the whole Bible, which we're going to read some of today.

First let's pray and ask God to prepare our hearts for Him to enter and work there. Pray with me. Jesus, we are so thankful that You have come to be with us.

[ 2 : 23 ] That You were born and lived and died and rose for us. And we ask this morning as we celebrate that, that You would come by Your Spirit to be with us again.

That You would work in us that we might have soft hearts and open eyes and ears. That we might hear Your Word.

That we might know You and rejoice more in who You are. Come and work in our hearts, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

For our Advent readings this December, my family is reading through different Old Testament stories that build up to and prepare us for the birth of Jesus.

I love how that helps me see the glory of Christmas, how much we need it. I mean, the Christmas story itself is beautiful, right? Baby in a manger, shepherds and angels.

[ 3 : 25 ] We'll read that story together Tuesday night. But Christmas is a part, a climactic part, of a much bigger story.

Some of our favorite music helps us to see this truth. Whether it's Peterson's Behold the Lamb of God, or Handel's Messiah.

They tell that bigger story, right? It's a story too big for any of us to comprehend fully, but none of us is too small to be an important character in it.

It's a story of blessing and curse, and then blessing flowing as far as that curse is found.

I want to read you an abridged version of that story this morning for several minutes. I figured if I'm going to be so unusual and read you the story, then I ought to sit down to do it.

[ 4 : 32 ] But listen as we begin where this greatest of all stories does. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and God saw that it was good.

Then God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness. So God created man in His own image. In the image of God, He created him. Male and female, He created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. But when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes,

and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.

And she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. The Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field.

On your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

[ 5 : 50 ] To the woman, He said, I will surely multiply your pain and childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children. And to Adam He said, Cursed is the ground because of you.

In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. Now the Lord said to Abram, I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. But they abandoned the Lord God, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt.

They went after other gods. In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken.

Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly.

[ 7 : 07 ] They have forsaken the Lord. They are utterly estranged. Your country lies desolate. Your cities are burned with fire. In your very presence foreigners devour your land. It is desolate.

And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. But there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. With righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together, and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze. Their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples, of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

[ 8 : 31 ] For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create.

For behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in my people. No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping, and the cry of distress.

They shall build houses and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their descendants with them.

The wolf and the lamb shall graze together. The lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

A curse on everything. And at this point, it still seems messed up.

[ 9 : 35 ] Although there's promise of a glorious future. And then, Christmas. Finally, things begin to get fixed.

The story gets, as it were, a fresh start. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.

And we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. As Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, Ha!

What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. But Jesus rebuked him, saying, Be silent and come out of him.

[10:47] And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. And they were all amazed, and said to one another, What is this word?

For with authority and power, He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out. And Jesus awoke, and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, Peace, be still.

And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to the disciples, Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith? And they were filled with great fear, and said to one another, Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?

They said, John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another? In that hour, Jesus healed many people of diseases, and plagues, and evil spirits, and on many who were blind, He bestowed sight.

And He answered them, Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.

[12:05] And blessed is the one who is not offended by Me. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption, and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

So then those who are of faith are blessed, along with Abraham, the man of faith. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree. So that in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles.

[13:22] For in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

And the end. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. And God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. I'm making all things new.

[14:38] What an amazing way to end an amazing story. Do you see how God is at work in that story, restoring all of his creation to the glory he intended it to have before we broke it?

The curse is found everywhere, right? Men and women. Pain and labor.

The very earth we walk on is under a curse, so that we experience that futility, that groaning of corrupt creation.

We know firsthand the fallen realities of broken relationships with other people.

Of storms that cause death and destruction. Of Satan battling against us and tempting us to deny God's goodness.

[15:42] Of predatory animals, blighted plants. Of hungry nations, malnourished babies. Of cancer cells that attack mercilessly.

Y'all, do I need to keep going? This world is so far from what its creator intended.

But Christmas. But at Christmas, Jesus comes to make his blessings flow as far as the curse is found.

At Christmas, God lands on the beachhead of our world in the flesh and plants the flag that he is taking back his entire creation.

That he is coming to take the curse. In fact, to become the curse. So that God's blessing can flow to us.

[16:45] That's why we rejoice. Not because that war is completely finished, right? But because he has secured the ultimate victory.

It's like when those forces landed on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. Full and final victory and restoration of everything would take several months, even years.

But when they took that beach, that beach had meant that victory was coming, right? That's what Jesus does at Christmas in God's war against Satan.

The serpent who brought sin and the curse into the world. Jesus comes to crush his head. Amen? Jesus comes and demonstrates his absolute power over Satan and his minions.

And it touches more than that spiritual war. Christmas touches everything, right? Jesus lives in the flesh, showing how much God values his material creation.

[18:01] It's not all there is, but it's not worthless either. Some would have you believe it's all there is. Others would have you believe it's not valuable at all.

But no, even the trees clap their hands for this Savior. He gives us a taste of that creation working the way that it should as he heals and calms storms and brings life from death.

Because he is the true king. So already, blessing flows to us now. Sinners reconciled today to God through Jesus.

With the hope and confidence that the king is reigning over all now and is coming again to finish the work of reconciling to himself all things.

Making all things new. And Christmas says, that great day is coming. And then it gets even better because Jesus invites us into that amazing work alongside him.

[19:18] Because his blessing is also to flow through us. Just like Abraham, God says, I will bless you and you will be a blessing to all the nations of the earth.

So he says that we will, that we actually play an important part in this great story. Don't we long, don't we all long to be a part of something that is bigger than ourselves?

To matter in a huge story? But don't we many days and most days when we wake up feel that we're not?

It's just me. Samwise Gamgee is my favorite example of someone small.

A tiny hobbit. A common gardener. Someone small playing a big role in a huge story.

[20:24] As he and Frodo struggle toward Mount Doom with the ring of power battling for good against all the evil in the world. He stops to reflect on being a part of this big story.

By rights, we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were.

And sometimes you didn't want to know the end because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow.

Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines, it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant something.

Even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk and those stories had lots of chances of turning back.

[21:32] Only they didn't. They kept going. Because they were holding on to something. What are we holding on to, Sam? That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo.

And it's worth fighting for. Yes. He got it. See, if there's something good, if God himself has entered into our story, has been born into our world on a mission to defeat darkness and bring light to all creation in ways we've never even imagined, then we're part of something much bigger than ourselves every single day.

We are a part of something cosmic and eternally significant when we care for God's creation. When we pick up trash or plant a tree.

When we serve the poor or love our neighbors. When we forgive our kids or our parents or our friends.

When we are faithful gardeners or mothers or coaches or engineers or students or doctors. In all these things, we are laboring for King Jesus who says, No more growing sin.

[23:00] Fight it. No more growing sorrows. Wipe people's tears for them. No more infesting thorns.

Root them out. We're giving people a foretaste of the kind of kingdom that is coming when King Jesus fully and finally comes on his throne to dwell with us forever. One theologian said it this way in Time Magazine even this week. Those who have been rescued by the gospel are called to play a part right now in the advance renewal of the world. God will put the whole world right and in justification he puts people right by the gospel to be part of his putting right project for the world. Christian mission includes bringing real advance signs of new creation into the present world. In healing. In justice. In beauty.

[ 24 : 05 ] In celebrating the new creation and lamenting the continuing pain of the old. Yes, that is so good. The scriptures always promised that when the life of heaven came to earth through the work of Israel's Messiah, the weak and the vulnerable would receive special care and protection and the desert would blossom like the rose.

Care for the poor and the planet then becomes central, not peripheral for those who intend to live in faith and hope by the Spirit between the resurrection of Jesus and the coming renewal of all things. See, God's grace and His justice and His beauty and His righteousness are blessings to you. And they are to be blessings through you today and every day to your family, your neighbor, your friend, the least, the lonely, the lost.

So that they, in their experience of the curse, taste the blessing that the baby in the manger has landed with the first fruits that the foretastes of.

[ 25 : 28 ] That He has reversed the curse. That He is making everything sad come untrue. And they will experience that in their lives. And so they will long for Him and the fullness of restoration and blessing that He will one day bring.

After all, it is the King, the baby. Christmas is coming to us. That's at the center of this story, right? Christmas is coming to us. Whatever we do to play our small part in this grand story, it's all about Him. Tough to beat the way Sally Lloyd-Jones says it.

At the center of the story, there is a baby. Every story in the Bible whispers His name. He is like the missing piece in a puzzle.

The piece that makes all the other pieces fit together. And suddenly you can see a beautiful picture. And this is no ordinary baby. This is the child upon whom everything would depend.

[ 26 : 41 ] Everything depends on the child given to us. All creation. Every broken person or place or thing longing to be fixed looks.

To Him. And so the message to go tell on the mountain is joy. Rejoice. Jesus Christ is born.

The Lord has come. And is coming again. Let's pray. Oh, Jesus. We do rejoice in that.

In the fact that You have come. That You have conquered. And in particular that You are coming again. And that You will make all things new.

We need that in our hearts and lives. We thank You that You make us new. And bring us back into relationship with our Father.

[ 27 : 47 ] And now, Jesus, we ask that You would give us great joy in being a part of Your restoration project. Of Your putting things right.

Sharing the joy of a Savior and a King who rules over all of it with everybody we know. Might we be a part, humbly and gratefully a part of Your great work in this glorious story.

We give You all the praise. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.