

Jesus in the spotlight

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[0 : 0 0] good morning everyone how about if we pray as we launch into this text this morning gracious god we thank you for your word we thank you for this time this season we recall the great event of not just the birth of a baby but the of the great god into this world entered into our world and we ask lord now that you would enter into our hearts we ask it for your sake amen it's the height of ambition for many five-year-olds at christmas time they're now too old to play the baby jesus in the nativity play and the very next thing that you want to do is you want to be mary mary's the other key player here however each one person one girl to be selected for such dizzying heights of drama to play mary there on the central roles of the nativity play go in descending order there's the magi there's the angels the shepherds king herod the sheep the donkeys the cows and somewhere at the back is joseph he often gets a very passive part in most nativity plays he only plays this often though he says a very few lines and in fact when i often see nativity set up joseph's the guy right at the back there somewhere he's the guy looking after the sheep that's his job that's all he does uh as you know so many husbands at the time of birth um in most nativity's joseph says virtually none he has a very small part to play and the scripts often forget that the angel came to joseph too and in fact there is something that the angel said to joseph didn't say to anyone else in the other appearances in nativity's he never said it to anyone else the angel tells joseph in a dream that the baby born is a fulfillment of a prophecy from hundreds of years earlier prophecy promises to dwell with his people and in this interaction between joseph and the angel we have the invaluable treasure of a name emmanuel and that's our focus this there are three main things we learn just simply learn from the name emmanuel firstly that jesus is god that he's human and that he is with us so let's go jesus is god there are several ways that matthew drives home the core christmas message that jesus is not simply a great teacher or even angelic being but in fact that jesus is divine in verse 20 the angels tell joseph that the human life that's growing inside of the

Mary has not come from any human being but from the heavenly father and that is jesus has two fathers if you like and joseph will be jesus father only in a secondary sense is it my microphone's going on and off it isn't it so maybe do you want me to get another one for me i'm not sure what the microphone is just dwell on that point for a moment there we go how about that is that working okay there we go all right fantastic thank you john and thank you sound team um Mary is is pregnant by the holy spirit god is the real father however the most direct statement of jesus identity is in verse 23 matthew quotes from isaiah chapter 7 verse 14 hundreds of years before the prophet says the virgin will conceive give birth to a son and you will call him emmanuel which means god with us now for centuries jewish religious leaders and scholars had known about that prophecy but they had not thought to ever take it literally that god would be with us literally matthew is saying this promise is greater than anyone imagined jesus christ is god with us because the human life growing in the womb in of mary was a miracle that was performed by god himself this child is literally god the divine in the fullest sense now what makes this so remarkable is that matthew who's writing this was a jew that's what's remarkable here the jews distinctive view of god made them the people on earth least open to the idea that a human being could be god least open to that idea you see the eastern religions at the time believed that god was an impersonal force that permeated all things and so in their sense god could be everywhere god could be everywhere with us it wasn't unusual for them to say that there might be a human being that particularly had great manifestations of the divine in the way that they lived their life western religions at the time believed that gods would disguise themselves as human beings for their own purposes jews jews however believed distinctly among all other nations and people groups in the world they believed in a god who was both personal and infinite god was not a being within the universe but was instead the ground of the universe existence and infinitely transcendent above the universe everything in the human world

view was against the idea that god would be close personal and certainly not human he was far too transcendent in fact jews would not even pronounce the covenant name of their god yahweh they would not even spell it because it was too familiar too familiar and yet jesus christ by his life by his claims by his resurrection convinced his closest circle of jewish followers that he was not just a prophet telling them how to find god but that he was in fact god himself come to find us now matthew's not the only biblical author to teach this john the apostle paul a jew and a pharisee the apostle peter another jewish man they all declared it the opinion of these authors would not mean much however if jesus himself hadn't declared that he was in fact divine all through his biographical accounts jesus is constantly forgiving sin which they identified that's only what god can do he also claims i am going to come back to judge the world they knew that that was god's job to do that at many times and in a whole heap of various ways jesus christ a jewish man said i am god the only one in fact of world religious leaders that have actually declared i am god and thousands upon thousands believed him and came to worship him and now across the globe millions upon millions christmas many know this claim and give the claim lip service at christmas without actually thinking about the implications of what it is that we sing in the christmas carols if jesus really is god what does it mean for us practically well first of all it means an intellectual turning point for us this is a massive intellectual shift that has to take place some have argued that the supreme miracle of christianity is not the resurrection of christ from the dead but the coming of god into the world as a human being that's the supreme miracle of christianity what we celebrate at christmas time of all the things that christianity proclaims this one is the most staggering the late canadian theologian jr packard puts it like this god became man the divine son became a jew the almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby unable to do more than lie there and stare and wriggle and make noises needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child it's staggering when you think about it how an infinite god created all things stands outside of his created order became so dependent upon the people who he gives his very breath of life too nothing in fiction is as staggering as that as as fantastic as that the claim that jesus is god is an intellectual turning point but it also causes a personal crisis a crisis is a fork in the road the assertion that jesus christ is god is exactly that fork in a road whenever you see jesus acting in the gospels you see him consistently putting people into motion that's what he does like a bowling ball to to to the pins providing you get it to the pins at the bowling alley it sets them in motion makes them move and he's like this giant bowling ball wherever he goes he breaks up old patterns he sends people off in new directions jesus evokes extreme responses from people some are so furious with him that they try to grab him and throw him off a cliff to kill him others are so terrified by him they fall to the ground and they say depart from me get away from me others fall down and worship why the extreme reactions it's because of who he claims to be that's why if he is who he says he is then it is essential that you center your life on him all of your life on him he claims to be the God who creates all things the source of all life and the one who defines all reality for all of humanity and so if he is not who he says he is then he is someone to be hated he is someone to run from because he is the greatest fraud in history no other response makes sense to Jesus paying some kind of benign reference to him at Christmas time makes no sense at all intellectual historical sense to the person of Jesus at all you either have to despise and reject him or you have to surrender to him there's no middle ground there's no niceness about Christmas carols either he is

[14:17] God or he isn't he's absolutely crazy and dangerous or he's infinitely wonderful there's no middle ground but thirdly the claim that Jesus is God also gives us the greatest possible hope the one who creates determines defines all things all reality says that our world is not all that there is he says that there is in fact life and love and hope and joy after death and that the evil and suffering that we experience in this world will one day end and that's not just hope for this world despite all its unending problems but it's hope for you and me despite all our unending failings a

God who was only a God who was only perfectly good for instance would not have come down in the person of Jesus Christ a God who was just good kind kind of God if that's he would not have come down in the person of Jesus Christ he would have just simply demanded that we pull ourselves socks up that we be moral that we be good and that we would earn enough merit in order to have his favour dwell on us if he was just good on the other hand a God who was just all accepting God of love and you know let bygones be guy gone kind of a God just let's cruise go easy he would also not have come down of the modern imagination a God whose job is purely to

overlook me ignoring him in life that's what he does he's just this great moral jellyfish he's like a big marshmallow that you cuddle occasionally at

Christmas time and Easter time the modern imagination that God just overlooks sin just overlooks evil he just embraces us for who we are and just leaves us to get on with life our way and in the end he will just say well you did your best neither of those gods would have bothered with Christmas the biblical God however is infinitely good and perfect and so our sin cannot be shrugged off our rejection of him cannot be ignored it must be dealt with but he's also infinitely loving he knows we can never climb up to him he knows that our socks can never be pulled up far enough and so he comes to us he has come God himself has come to us to do what we couldn't do and that means Christmas is hope it's a light shining in darkness man he is human the interaction between Joseph and the angel reveals that Jesus is God but also that Jesus is one of us he is human Christmas tells us that Jesus was truly and fully God and truly and fully human but what difference does that make to the way that we actually live that God has become fully human well I would suggest the New Testament would suggest the difference it makes to us now is it results in a life of service as we have been served by him it results in a life of service the humanity of Jesus results in a life of service Philippians 2 5 to 11 in the

New Testament we read it out last week teaches us that when the Son of God became human he did not lay aside his deity he was still God but he emptied himself of his glory of his divine rights he became vulnerable and ordinary in order to serve us quoting J.R.

[19:02] Packer again for the Son of God to empty himself become poor meant a laying aside of glory a voluntary restraint of power an acceptance of hardship isolation ill treatment malice and misunderstanding and finally a death that involves such agony spiritual even more than physical all that his mind nearly broke under the prospect of it it meant love to the utmost for unlovely people and here he goes on about Christmas I love this the Christmas spirit does not shine out in the Christian snob for the Christmas spirit is the spirit of those who like their master live their whole lives on the principle of making themselves poor spending and being spent to enrich their fellow human beings giving time trouble care and concern to do good to others and not just their own friends in whatever way there seems to be a need what a rebuke at a time where we take

Christmas as a moment of self indulgence the fact that God became human and emptied himself of his glory means that you should not want to hang out only with people who are people of power and glitz who are networked who can open doors for you you need to be willing to go to the people without power without the beauty without the money without the networks that's the Christmas spirit because God became one of us God becoming one of us also means infinite comfort in our suffering as we surrender our rights for the sake of others as we serve others Hebrews 2 17 says that Jesus was made like us fully human in every way and the very next verse tells us what this actually means because he himself suffered when he was tried and tested he is able to help those who are being tried and tested when something bad happens and real suffering comes to you it feels so lonely people around you may express sympathy but sometimes the sympathy doesn't help sometimes it just doesn't help and then you meet someone who's been through what you have been through they know what it's like you pour out your heart to them there's an empathy there you listen to them and their opinions because they've been through what you've been through and when they comfort you when they give you perspective you have comfort and you have perspective the coming of

God into this world on the first Christmas ultimately means that God suffered and that Jesus triumphed through the suffering and Jesus therefore now has infinite power to comfort in the suffering your suffering Christmas shows you a God unlike the God of any other faith in this world have you been betrayed are you lonely have you been destitute have you faced death so has he so has he Christianity says God has been all the places that you have been or are right now he has been in the darkness you are right now and more more you can trust him you can rely on him he knows suffering and has the power to comfort strengthen and bring you through it that's because lastly he is with us it would have been astonishing enough if the son of

God had become human and simply lived temporarily amongst us and left leaving a set of teachings for us to abide by that would have been impressive his plan however was infinitely greater than that his plan was always to be with us Jesus chose 12 apostles and appointed them so that they would be with him ever notice that you would be with me when he calls his 12 apostles what does that mean with him it means being in his presence conversing with him learning from him

having his comfort and his presence day by day the purpose of God coming into this world is that we would have a relation with him we would walk with him commune with him in Jesus the unapproachable God becomes a human being who can be known and loved related to spoken to with and through faith we can know that love right now every single day this does not let me just pause between that that should stun us it should stun our existence you should have something in your gut that gets churned when I say that the infinite

God of the universe is with us in the Old Testament anytime anyone drew near to God it was completely terrifying God appears to Abraham as a smoking furnace to Israel as a pillar of fire to Job as a hurricane and a tornado and when Moses asked to see God face to face he was told it would kill you so great so high and so unapproachable of this God and yet the message of Christmas means that through Jesus Christ you come face to face with God you can know him personally without terror when this

[26 : 15] God showed up in the person of Jesus he was not a pillar of fire he wasn't a tornado he was a baby a baby why would God come this time in the form of a baby rather than as a fire storm or a tornado this time he has come not to bring judgment but to bear it to pay the penalty for our sin of rejecting God to take away the barrier between humanity and God so that we can be together the purpose of his creation Jesus is with us every Christmas millions upon millions of people sing if they don't sing it they certainly hear it heard it yesterday in the shopping centres

Jesus our Emmanuel world and yet I'm thinking as I walk through the shops are you really with him are you really with him do you know him Jesus literally moved heaven and earth to get near us what should we be doing now to truly be with him there's one crucial trait that's necessary for having such a relationship with Jesus and it is more and I think that it's one step it's one of these traits I think that Christians in Western society especially are most likely to overlook an intimate relationship with

Jesus always requires courage always requires courage and that's hard for us particularly in the West because mostly we are fearful we're not courageous we're scared we're cautious rather than courageous and it's wonderful to look out and see a room full of people with face masks on because it just proves the point we can't know Jesus personally that's not a criticism I had mine on a moment ago we can't know Jesus personally unless we have the courage to admit that we are in fact a sinner we are flawed we are failed we are deserving of God's judgment admit that we choose day by day to reject our creator and to live life our way

Jesus entire mission is summed up in verse 21 he will save his people from their sins so first and foremost Jesus came into this world to forgive us every other blessing that we have from him flows from that forgiveness of sin and so are you willing to say this Christmas and can I say this especially for those of you who have gathered many many times at Christmas times maybe even time and you've heard this again and again and again and you sing Emmanuel God with us are you willing to say to have the courage maybe for the first time ever this Christmas I am a moral failure look at the carnage around my life look at the broken relationships everywhere

I'm a moral failure I don't love God with all of my heart with all of my soul with all of my strength with all of my mind I don't love my neighbour as myself and therefore I'm guilty I need forgiveness and I need pardon from God before I need anything else this Christmas that's the gift I need it takes enormous courage to admit these things and in fact I would say for you who are Christian gathering the whole Christian journey is a life of realising how much of a failure you are it means it's courage because it means throwing your old self image that you built up over all of these years out and getting a brand new one from Jesus Christ and yet that is the foundation for all other things that Jesus wants to bring to your life all the comfort all the hope all the joyful humility and everything else so how do you get the strength to be courageous like that there's only one way and that's by looking to Jesus at Christmas time looking to him because if you think it takes courage to be with

[31 : 55] Jesus consider the infinite infinite courage it took him in order to be with us only Christianity says one of the attributes of God is courage Christianity is the only faith in the whole world that says one of the attributes of God is courage no other religion who has a God a deity that needs courage Jesus could only save us by facing an agonising death that has him wrestling with tears of sweat and blood in the garden of Gethsemane he became mortal and vulnerable so that he could suffer be betrayed be killed he faced all these things for you and for me and he thought it was worth it just look at him facing your darkness so that you can have light and that will enable you to face any darkness in life and still have the light of hope you've heard the phrase sung every

Christmas potentially hark the herald angels sing and then it goes on to say mild he lays his glory by what on earth does that mean mild he lays his glory by what it means is he did it voluntarily he laid his glory voluntarily lovingly willingly no one forced him to do it it wasn't a duty that he had to do he faced unimaginable pain and death and darkness happiness and he chose to do it voluntary out of love for you and for me and for all of humanity why did Jesus have the courage to do what he did love how do we get the courage to admit that we're a sinner and need his forgiveness and his relationship with him the exact same way we see him doing everything that he's done for us out of love for us and it will draw out our love for him and then we will have the courage to put him in the centre of our life and then we will be he will be with you and you with him Emmanuel Jesus is God he's human and he's with us now