

We need Saving

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[0 : 0 0] Once upon a time, there was a young lady due to be married to the handsome woodworker. They were about to journey to a distant land when Mary's angel godfather, Gabriel, came down and said, Good news, you will bear a prince.

Joseph the woodworker and Mary set off to their distant hometown of Bethlehem because the evil Romans had called a census. And so everyone had to go to their hometown.

When they arrived, the town was full. Not even people's guest rooms were free. And Mary gave birth to the prince Jesus. And they lay him in a manger with all the other talking and singing animals.

The shepherds, Bozo, Fopso and Greg, came to visit. And the mysterious Magi came and gave gifts. And everyone learnt a good lesson about love and sharing.

And that's the end of the story. At least, that's how Christmas can seem. It can seem like it's just a fairy tale.

[1 : 1 0] And we all know that story. And we all have a smile. And it's all a bit lovely. Because we do love a good fairy tale. It seems our movies and TV shows are all full of fairy tales.

We read fairy tales to our kids. We read them in our books. And Christmas can often look like a fairy tale.

You know, that story I told a moment ago, it's mostly the story of Christmas. But what do we lose when Christmas is just a fairy tale?

What happens when we cut it out of the historical origins? And what happens when we forget how amazing it is? And forget the enormity that God became human?

So today, as we look at the old, old story of Christmas, we're going to put that story back into its historical context. And we're going to see how this story is part of the bigger picture of God's story for salvation.

[2 : 1 5] Please have your Bibles open. We're a church who loves to read God's Word. We're in the part of the Bible called Luke. And we're in chapter 2 at the start.

If you need a Bible, just pop your hand up. And one of our people in red vests would love to get you one. If not, it'll be on the screen. Luke chapter 2 from verse 1. At the start of Luke's telling of the birth of Jesus, he grounds it in history.

In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.

And everyone went to their own town to register. Caesar Augustus... I keep saying Augustus like... He's from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

Augustus Gloop. Should it be Augustus? Yeah, thank you. Is anybody particularly good in their Roman history? Yes? Some people? Okay, thank you. You can correct me. Augustus?

[3 : 1 7] Does that feel a little bit better? Yeah, sorry. Caesar Augustus. He was actually called Octavian. He was the son of Julius Caesar's nephew. And he became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire after he defeated Antony and Cleopatra.

And then he was given the title Augustus, which means holy or majestic. He was the first of the emperors to really encourage people to worship him as God.

They had this cult of the emperor where they would encourage people to see them as God. And there was this fantastical story that went around that he was miraculously conceived by a serpent.

And there's actually an inscription in the British Museum from this time that says about Augustus, it says, He is God, the Son of God and Saviour, bringer of peace and hope and good news.

Now this was all happening around five years, five to ten years before Jesus was born. And this was spread around about Octavius, about Caesar Augustus, as good news.

[4 : 31] This was the gospel that went around. That he is the Son of God and Saviour, the bringer of peace and hope and good news. And you know, if you were the emperor, you'd really want people to believe this.

You know, you'd spread this around. Yes, this gives me a mandate from heaven to be in charge because I'm the Son of God. I've taken over. I'm in control. Don't fight with me.

And at the very start of the story of Jesus, it is no mistake that Luke reminds us of who is in charge. This man who had been going around, spreading this fairy tale, that he was the Son of God, the Saviour, the bringer of peace and hope and good news.

And so while there's this story being spread around, Luke is going to tell God's story of salvation, which is no made up fairy tale. And Luke brings a contrast between Augustus and a baby, one who calls himself the Son of God and one who will be called the Son of God by God himself.

And we'll see this contrast in a moment with the angel's message. Joseph and his fiancée Mary, they've headed to Bethlehem because of Augustus' census, and they give birth after they arrive.

[5 : 50] But there's no guest room, so they place their baby Jesus into a manger. And an angel brings good news of a Saviour. Not Augustuses, not a military Saviour, but a true Saviour.

When we see angels in the Bible, it often conjures up images, well it does for me at least, conjures up images of big fluffy wings, halos. Angels are often described as bright, very shiny, but angel just means messenger.

And so when they come, they're delivering a message. And here they have a message from God, a message to counter the ruler who set himself up with his own fairy tale as the God and Saviour.

The angel speaks in verse 9. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said, do not be afraid.

I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people. Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord.

[7 : 04] This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. A Saviour. The one and true Saviour has been born.

He is the Messiah, which means, Messiah means that he is chosen. So it's not some upstart son of God, Saviour. It is God's chosen Saviour. Wrapped and placed in a manger.

It is this beautiful contradiction. The highest position, God, the son of God, placed in a manger where animals would be eating their food.

This is God's story of salvation. That salvation will come to a people who are desperate to be saved.

God's story of salvation is written in a way that no fairy tale would be written. Yes, there is a miraculous birth to an unlikely mother born in a town of little to no importance or significance.

[8 : 07] The good news sent by God does not go to those who can write songs about it. It doesn't go to the ballads of the time to sing songs and spread it around.

The good news doesn't go to those who have the fastest horses to spread the good news around. The good news doesn't go to royalty. God sends his messengers, the angels, to some shepherds on a hill in the middle of the night.

Shepherds were disliked, dirty, despised, people of questionable taste and character. And they get visited by an angel and then a whole army of angels.

As unlikely as the birth is, the story continues. The shepherds hear the angels and they decide to go and visit this baby. And so they visit and then after that they are so joyous and excited they continue to praise God and spread the good news.

The good news about this saviour has come to even the lowliest of low. Even these despised shepherds have a place before God.

[9 : 20] Even they have a role to play in his kingdom. God's story of salvation continues after Jesus' birth in ways that we again would not write it.

the great God-man Jesus. He never disobeys his father and yet he's ridiculed, he is murdered, he is shamed before all people on a cross.

His best friends flee and hide. This salvation does not look like a mighty Caesar's salvation or victory. It's not a triumphant tale that we would tell but it's Jesus' triumph.

It's God's story of salvation shown in weakness. His salvation is not a battle won by a man but by a man humbly led to a tree.

This man was raised three days later but again, if this was me I would probably appear to my enemies and gloat I'd be like ha ha you tried to kill me it didn't work and here I am to smite you but Jesus doesn't do that.

[10 : 28] His victory isn't over Pilate the governor it isn't over earthly powers it is over sin and death. This is not a story that we would write but this is how the God of the universe would intervene and save his people.

The good news is proclaimed one quiet night to shepherds about a boy that was born who is our saviour. Now at this point we could leave it there we could think oh that's that's a great story sure it's more than a fairy tale it's history it's truth the angels came and told truth it's really interesting I'm happy to come and hear about it once a year but why care?

maybe it's just a 2000 year old truth and that's all it needs to be it is God's good news to us today because it's not just an old story of God's it is a story that continues and he invites us to be part of his story this is still our story and we need this story of God's salvation yes a lot has changed in 2000 years technology has changed life expectancy has changed the quality of food and housing and education has changed but who we are at our core is still the same people desperate for a saviour we've become more advanced but we're still fighting wars wars against other countries wars against other ethnicities wars within our own families each of us writing our own story of what we want to save us we want to be in control of our story and have our own version of our saviour I wonder if you were going to write a story today you know later on today you get a little bit full a little bit sick of spending time with your family and you were going to write a fairy tale with yourself in the middle what would your character be what kind of fairy tale character would you be would you be the strong warrior ready to fight and save your people would you be the princess in the high castle waiting for someone to come and save you would you be the person in charge of everything maybe you feel that way you've got Christmas lunch coming up and you know it has to be particular you have to have everybody in the right spots in the kitchen doing the right thing you have to be that person in charge but these are all in a sense wish fulfillment we want to have value and we want someone to care enough for us that they come and slay a dragon we wish we had enough power to influence a country we want to write our own fairy tales with us as the hero but when we do that we're pretty much the same as

Caesar Augustus who wrote our story has already been written and it is part of God's biggest story God's story of salvation is not written the way that we would write it but we need this Christmas and each Christmas to remind us that we are the ones who need to be saved saved from making life all about us saved from sin and from death in God's story of salvation we are not the hero we are not the princess and the reality is we are most like the shepherds dirty despised despicable people of questionable character because to God we are damaged and sinful and dirty but the angel came to these shepherds first and he told them the good news that Jesus had been born and they could go and see

[14 : 35] Jesus himself and then they went out and told everybody and they praised God we don't need to build our lives up into a fairy tale because God already has us in his story like the shepherds God shares the good news with us he takes us to see the birth of Jesus here we are again dwelling and considering the birth of Jesus not because we are special or that we are the hero but because God is special and he is the hero and he invites us to be part of his story I love how the shepherds respond to meeting baby Jesus in verse 17 verse 17 they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them down to verse 20 the shepherds returned glorifying and praising

God for all the things they had heard and seen the shepherds these lowly dirty despised despicable people get invited to be like the angels the angels came and shared God's message and praised and sang about how awesome God is and then the shepherds visit Jesus and then go off and share his message and praise God they were the lowly and they get brought into God's story of salvation they had the chance to see it and spread God's story with great joy we are invited into God's story of salvation just like the shepherds and we're invited to share God's good news with the rest of the world and we can be praising God like the shepherds praising him because he is awesome and mighty and he has cared for us who are lowly as we speak of fairy tales at

Christmas I couldn't help but remember the most common fairy tale going around at Christmas time for the last couple of years talking about Star Wars of course I am not sure if you are Star Wars fans is anybody a Star Wars fan here yes well done it's nice to see there's some wise people here years

ago when these movies were being made in Sydney a friend of mine had the chance to go and do work experience on the set of one of the Star Wars movies I tell you what we were stories that millions of people have seen now 11 movies long he got to be part he wasn't in the movie he didn't have a cameo or anything he was just there when it was being made he got to be part of that amazing story the shepherds were invited to come and to see Jesus to be part of something bigger than themselves something far more important than sheep and God invites far more impressive and more life changing story than Star Wars and God calls us to follow this baby this man who would grow up to die for us who is going to return and when we do God has a part for all of us in his story to praise God which we've been doing this morning in song to reflect on how amazing he is and to go and tell other people what he has done so let me encourage you at some point Christmas day boxing day the next couple of days which all kind of blur into one long mass of food and napping take a moment to dwell on how amazing it is that Jesus came and that we get to be part of this story of God's story and share it with other people Amen for if