

# Re-Count 2023

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Date: 31 December 2023

Preacher: Mike Birmingham

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning. If I haven't wished you a happy Christmas, I'm too late.

I hope you had a happy Christmas and I hope you're all celebrating tonight. As you see the new year coming in, you'll stay up until early hours of the morning and enjoy it. Those of you who are at home watching, we welcome you here.

If you're visiting with us because it's Christmas, lovely to have you here. A very warm welcome to you all. If anybody needs explorers, that's the creche. There is one downstairs if you need it for these sort of threes and unders.

Otherwise, I think everybody's staying in to enjoy this together as we celebrate and worship our God. Can I ask you to stand as we read our call to worship?

If I read the ones in italics and you read with the bold print, that would be great. Psalm 105, as we come into God's presence.

[ 1 : 03 ] Give praise to the Lord. Proclaim his name. Make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him. Sing praise to him.

Tell the Lord his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name. Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

Look to the Lord and ask his strength. Seek his face always. As we continue to worship God, we've got a couple of songs we're going to sing. Come, Lord Jesus, in your glory.

Come and fill this place. Come and save. Have your way among us as we seek your face. When we lay our cares before you, may our striving cease.

As we worship and adore you, lead us to your peace. Come, Lord Jesus, in your glory.

[ 2 : 10 ] Come and fill this place. Come and fill this place. Come and have your way among us as we seek your face.

When we lay our cares before you, may our striving cease. As we worship and adore you, lead us to your peace.

Come and fill this place.

Change your glory into glory. Change your glory into glory. Grant your way face to grace.

I am served, rescued, healed, and holy by your saving grace. Amen.

[ 3 : 42 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Death is beaten, love has overcome. Every tear will turn to gladness, every battle won.

Joining with the saints and angels, praising you alone.

There will be with you forever, our eternal home.

Lord Jesus, we so thank you that we can join with the saints and angels praising you. We thank you for that promise that one day we will see you face to face and be in your presence.

[ 5 : 12 ] In the meantime, Lord, we ask for your strength. We ask for your wisdom. We ask for your grace. We ask for your forgiveness. We ask that as we come before you, we come before you clean because of the Lord, having washed our sins away.

We want to thank you and we praise you and we continue to praise you this morning. God, the uncreated one, the author of salvation. He wrote the laws of space and time, the world of his design.

The one whom angel hosts revere, hung the stars like chandeliers, numbered every grain of sand and knows the very heart of man.

It's this God that we worship. We'll sing this song together. God, the uncreated one. The author of salvation.

He wrote the laws of space and time, wrote the laws of space and time, and fashioned works to his design.



to 23 speak up and get behind the mic get behind the mic are we all up here?  
good anybody using this microphone? you can use that microphone you've got one there oh you've got one there as well we're chaotic no we're not we're organised this is organised chaos ok  
Matthew's Gospel chapter 2 verses 1 to 23 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 start in the east 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 Christ was to be born in Bethlehem in Judea for this is what the prophet has written but you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel Israel then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared he sent them to Bethlehem and said go and make a careful search for the child as soon as you find him report to me so that I too may go and worship him after they had heard the king they went on their way and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was when they saw the star they were overjoyed on coming to the house they saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshipped him then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold incense and myrrh and having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod they returned to their country by another route when they had gone an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream get up take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt stay there until I tell you for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him so he got up took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt where he stayed until the death of Herod and so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet out of Egypt I have called my son when Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi he was furious and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled a voice is heard in Rama weeping and great mourning Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted because they are no more after Herod died an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said get up take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead so he got up took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel but when he heard that Archelus was reigning in Judea in place of Herod his father Herod he was afraid to go there having been warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth so was fulfilled what was said through the prophets he will be called a Nazarene and all the people said Amen thank you do take a seat we're going to sing again here is love vast as the ocean loving kindness as the flood when the Prince of life our ransom shed for us his precious blood who his love will not remember to sing his praise he will never be forgotten throughout Heaven's eternal days grace takes my sin calls me friend pays my debts completely love rescued me seated me with my King forevermore what a privilege let's sing and praise God as we sing this and thank him for what he's done for you here is love vast as the ocean loving kindness as the flood when the Prince of life of life shed for us his precious blood who his love will not remember who can cease!

[ 21 : 06 ] to sing his praise remember who can cease to sing his praise he can never be forgotten throughout Heaven's eternal days grace takes my sin calls me friend pays my debt completely love love seated me with my King forevermore with my King forevermore forevermore on the mount of crucifixion fountains open deep and wide through the floodgates of God's mercy flowed a vast and gracious tide through the floodgates of God's mercy through the floodgates of God's mercy through the floodgates of God's mercy through the vast and gracious tide

Born incessant from above And hence peace and perfect justice Is the guilty one in love Grace takes my sin, calls me friend Faced my debt completely Love rescued me Seated me with my King Forevermore Ooh, ooh, ooh Let me all your love accepting Love you ever all my days Let me seek your kingdom only And my life be to your praise You alone shall be my glory Nothing in the world I see You have cleansed and sanctified me God himself has set me free Grace takes my sin, calls me friend Faced my debt completely Love rescued me Seated me with my King Forevermore

Thank you, Lord, for that promise Grace takes my sin, calls me friend And pays my debt completely It's your love that rescued me, Jesus Christ He seated me with my King Forevermore Praise you, Lord Thank you Amen Please be seated We're going to have now our second Bible reading Which Kate is going to bring to us Thank you This morning's reading is taken from Isaiah chapter 63 verses 7 to 9 And can be found on page 751 of our Bibles

It's titled Praise and Prayer I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord The deeds for which he is to be praised According to all the Lord has done for us Yes, the many good things he has done for Israel According to his compassion and many kindnesses He said Surely they are my people Children who will be true to me And so he became their saviour In all their distress He too was distressed And the angel of his presence saved them In his love and mercy he redeemed them He lifted them up And carried them All the days of old Thanks, Peter Thank you, Kate Let's pray Father, we thank you again for your words

[ 26 : 39 ] And you know each one of us And you know each of our needs today You've been with us through the last year And we thank you for your promise To be with us through the coming year And so we ask you to bless us As we look at your words And consider the past and the future And ask you to be in the centre of it And we ask it in Jesus' name Amen So, time to recount Time to recount For some maybe As you look back over the last year You're glad it's finished Maybe for some of you You might think that Actually it's been the same as every other year Not really any different Some of you It may be the best year ever But what have you learnt

Over the last year Of God's mercy Are you grateful For what he's provided for you Over and over again Last year How have you used The extra blessings That he's poured out on you Or how have you battled with him So how would you rate Last year On a one to ten Only you can answer that one Isaiah The prophet Said to the people of Israel And the people of Israel Today Are you as well You know God's chosen people If you're a Christian If you've given your heart And your life To Jesus Christ Then you are his child Isn't that fantastic To know That actually we are The children of God So this prophecy Is for us as well

To recount Over the last year What God has been doing In our lives Maybe you might say It's been a hell of a life Actually last year So many things Seem to have gone wrong And I've even been asking Where is God in it So Has he not yet Answered those prayers The promise is God says That if we're In step with him He hears our prayers And he will answer them In accordance with his will If it's his will That we want So what do you recount God said Surely they are my people That's you Me And those throughout the world Who have acknowledged That he became their saviour It wasn't a message That God's given us Through an angel Although we've heard The story of The wise men That we just read Or the magi It wasn't an angel That spoke to Like he spoke to Joseph And like he spoke to Mary It's by his son God sent his son Not an angel For us And he's offered us So much from it In his love And in his pity He redeemed us He looked on us And he saw how lost we were And he chose To sacrifice His son So that we might be free He lifted us up And carried us Through those last Through that last year Sometimes you might have felt That he wasn't carrying you But his promise is That he was So how do we recount 2023 When you look back On last year Is there anything That strikes you That you've been aware Of God working in your life I know Paul wrote In Philippians That Stop looking back Let's start looking forward But I think sometimes We need to look back To see what we've learnt About God That we can take Into the future He's been faithful I know for Drush and I It hasn't been The easiest year This year For personal things But God has blessed us God has seen us through God has answered prayers And is continuing to answer But he hasn't answered The one that we really want In the end But we trust That he will do So when we read Matthew chapters 2 1 to 12 It gave us some thoughts The Magi What faith these people had Came from a distant land They saw a star They trusted What they knew At that point That when they saw That star It would lead them

[ 31 : 44 ] To the King of Kings And they followed it They responded To the call To meet the King of Kings They searched diligently Sometimes we don't see The answers to our questions But are we really searching?

Are we really wanting to know? Sometimes When I was selling life insurance I remember people saying My boss saying to me If somebody keeps asking you questions Just check They're not just asking questions That they really don't want The answers to The good answer is If I answered that question for you Would you buy?

And they then had to think If I ask the question And he answers it He thinks I'm going to buy So I won't ask the question And I think sometimes God says You're asking for things You're constantly asking for things But do you really expect That you'll get them?

Are you really, really wanting The best For what you've got? The Magi searched diligently They wanted to find The King And they were overjoyed When they saw the star They bowed down And worshipped Jesus When they saw him When we come into the presence Of God in our prayers What's our worship like?

What's my worship like? And they opened up their treasures What treasures have we got That God wants? And maybe it's sometimes The question of looking In the mirror again And when we look in the mirror Normally we probably look And say Goodness, do I look that bad?

[ 33 : 20 ] But maybe When we look in the mirror And say God's looked at me And said You know He's worth it He's worth it I'll swap I'll swap my son Have you experienced that?

They were warned by God In a dream And they were obedient to God And they went Not going back To Herod Who was deceiving them They were valuable And significant What are the gifts That God wants us To give to him?

He doesn't need anything That we've got He doesn't need anything We've got It's like we don't need anything That our children Really give us For Christmas Do we? But it's lovely When they give it When they've thought of something And they've given it to us So when you look back What have you seen In the Magi That you could give?

What about King Herod? What has he got to offer? Not a Jew And obviously He didn't know his scriptures Otherwise he'd have known Where Jesus was going to be born When he heard the news He was disturbed When you hear the news Of the gospel Are you disturbed?

That those who do not Acknowledge Jesus Christ As their Lord and Saviour Will not be acknowledged By the Father Jesus says You accept my son I accept you You reject my son I reject you That's fair I won't let anything Into heaven That has sin So it must be dealt with And either you deal with it Which separates you from me Or you take my son And he's dealt with it Herod was disturbed When he heard There was another king That he had to bow down to And he deceived others Through it He was furious And he ordered to kill All those children Just so that he could Be safe on the throne He thought What has Joseph got To recount to the world?

[ 35 : 25 ] Called to be To take Mary as his wife How embarrassing That must have been Thinking of today's situation It's probably not nearly As embarrassing But in this time For the woman That you're going to have To be your wife To be found Having a child Before you've even Got together How do you take that?

And he was called To bring up Jesus With Mary And he was obedient And he did it You don't know What sort of flack That he got Because of that But he did it He was spoken to By an angel in a dream And he didn't just Throw it off And say Oh that was my imagination He listened And he obeyed He was told to go to Egypt And he went Is God telling you Or telling me To do something That we're saying Actually I don't think That's me I don't want to do that Maybe God's saying Actually It is you And I can equip you With what you need To do it Would you take it on For me? So That would be Joseph What would he recount To the world? What about Mary? She was obedient Even when it was Not convenient She's not married God says You're going to have My son Wow But hold on I'm not married She trusted When it could have meant The breakup Of her engagement What would Joseph think?

God dealt with that On a separate time But she found A deeper love With Joseph Bringing up Jesus She pondered What she saw In her heart Do you see things Happening in your life That you don't understand But you ponder on them?

I mean there must have been Loads of things That Mary had to go through That she didn't really understand But because you don't Understand it Doesn't mean you can't Believe it or accept it I know you probably Don't either But I don't understand How my brain works But I do believe That somewhere there I've got one I've had a CT scan And they proved it She pondered those things In her heart She must have thought Through those 33 years Of how Jesus was going The sorrows Of how he was being treated The sorrows Of perhaps not understanding Who he was And then standing At the foot of the cross And watching her son Die on the cross And it wasn't for him That he died It was for you and me She saw him die And she saw him risen What would she have to Recount to the world Over those 33 years That she knew Jesus What about Jesus?

[ 38 : 23 ] What has he got to Recount to the world? The garden of Gethsemane Is a really good example Isn't it? Father take this from me It's something That I really Really Not sure That I really Want to go through He wanted to go through it Because of the result But can you imagine Being faced From leaving Heaven's glory To go to a cross Be treated as a criminal And to be put to death On a cross But not only that The worst thing of all Was to have our sin On him He who knew no sin Took our sin Sacrificial giving What do we learn from that?

He had a purpose When he came And he knew why he came Do we know why we're here? Do we know why we're serving him At this particular time In this place? He had a love That was deeper Than any love And he was able To forgive Perhaps we would say The unforgivable And we don't usually Rate ourselves in that When we see People converted That used to be Drug addicts And used to be this And used to be that We think Wow That's That's That's a mystery That's enormous But what about The fact that he died For us?

What about What about that? How big was that? What would Jesus Recount To the world? So how will you be Recounting 2023 And what will you take Of him Into 2024?

Will you be like The wise men Seeking out Jesus Wherever he may lead you? Will you be like Herod Wanting to do things Your way Whatever the cost To others Because that's the easiest That's the nicest For me Or would we be like The shepherds We didn't read about them But they were blown away By the glory And just glad To be able to tell Others That they'd seen And experience God In their own lives Or would we be like The angels Worshipping and praising God For who he is Like Joseph Trusting Even though he did not Understand What it was all about Or like Mary Pondering in her heart What God is doing Through her Or like Jesus Having a purpose To be where God Wants us to be And it may And it may mean sacrifice So what do we recount To the world Reading God's word Is so important

But to gain knowledge Without knowing Jesus As Lord And saviour Is no substitute There are two kings In this story In this story King Jesus And a contrast King Herod Jesus came to bring Joy Rather than fury Came to bring love Rather than hate Came to bring peace Rather than battle And came to bring life Rather than death There are two kings We can commit ourselves to However only one Can reign King Jesus Or King I Who's going to be Our king In 2024 Just have a little time Of reflection And think back On last year And be able to Shut off the things That are negative For you And look at how You can use What God's given you

[ 42 : 06 ] In 2024 And then we'll sing again Heavenly Father We want to reflect With joy Over the last year But there are some things That have happened With us Through us Around us That have not necessarily Brought a lot of joy But we're thankful For that promise That you have been with us We don't understand Some of the things That have happened But we trust you To be with us In 2024 Help us to see The gifts That you've given us And how we might Use them for you Hear our prayer Father Thank you for this Last year And we pray That you go through With us

Into the new year In Jesus' name Amen Amen I'm going to sing Standing on this mountaintop Looking just how far We've come Knowing that for every step You were with us Have you experienced that?

If so, let's sing Standing on this mountaintop Looking just how far we've come Knowing that for every step You were with us Kneeling on this battleground Seeing just how much you've done Knowing every victory There's your power in us Scars and struggles on the way But with joy our hearts can say Yes, our hearts can say Never once did we ever walk alone Never once did you leave us on our own

You are faithful, God You are faithful Kneeling on this battleground Seeing just how much you've done Knowing every victory With your power in us Scars and struggles on the way But with joy our hearts can say Yes, our hearts can say Yes, our hearts can say Never once did we ever walk alone Never once did you leave us on our own You are faithful, God You are faithful You are faithful You are faithful Scars and struggles on the way But with joy our hearts can say Never once did we ever walk alone Carried by your constant grace Built within your perfect peace Never once we never walked alone Never once did we ever walk alone Never once did you leave us on our own You are faithful, God, you are faithful Scars and struggles on the way But with joy our hearts can say Never once did we never walk alone Carried by your constant grace Held within your perfect peace Never once did we never walk alone

[ 46 : 35 ] Our first step we are breathing in your grace Evermore we'll be breathing out your praise You are faithful, God, you are faithful You are faithful, God, you are faithful Amen. Please be

seated.

Ian will now bring our prayers of intercessions. Thank you, Ian. Let's come to our Lord in prayer. And as we approach the end of 2023 And about to start a new year Let's reflect on the year gone by And pray for the year to come Using some of the words of praise and prayer About God's character that was read to us In that passage from Isaiah 63 Lord, we reflect on your kindness On your many good things that you've done for us On your compassion And how you're with us in times of distress And most of all we reflect on the fact That you became our saviour And you redeemed us Lord, we thank you for the love and kindness You have shown us over this last year For the times when people have been kind to us And provided for us From the kindness and love of our mums and dads Of friends and colleagues And other people in our wider family and community We thank you for the times when people have shared a kind word With us Or a generous gift In 2024 Help us to take opportunities to show love And kindness to others In our families With our friends In our wider community Thank you for the many good things You've done for us over this year Thank you for the times when people have helped us Perhaps with difficult schoolwork Maybe with challenging situations in our jobs Or where people have provided practical help With things we find more difficult to do these days In 2024 Help us to show love to others Through the practical things we can do to help them Thank you Lord for your compassion For the fact that you hear us in times of distress Thank you that you are there with us

So I thank you that you are with those who have suffered bereavement Or been through particularly difficult times in 2023 Thank you that you walk alongside us in those times And we thank you for friends and family Who have also walked with us closely this year In difficult times And we pray for those in the wider world Who are in distress For those suffering physical or mental distress In our community in High Wycombe And for those further afield Particularly in other countries Who are suffering oppression Often because of conflict Lord bring that inner peace That only you can truly bring And lasting relief To those who are oppressed In 2024 In 2024 Be particularly near to those who have been bereaved To those whose hearts are troubled To those who are oppressed Give us compassionate hearts To walk with those people and support them Share us how we can do that [ 50 : 28 ] In practical ways in the year ahead Lord bring lasting peace In areas of conflict in your world Lord most of all we thank you That through your son Jesus You sent a saviour A redeemer Someone who has saved us From all the wrong things that we do Lord we have celebrated the coming of Jesus This Christmas time But we thank you that Jesus is not just a saviour At Christmas Or just in 2023 But for all time And we thank you that he's not just a saviour But a friend Someone that we can get to know personally We thank you for the opportunities We've had this year To get to know Jesus better As our friend To meet with him Through what we learn in services And in our groups on a Sunday And groups that meet during the week And we thank you for the opportunities That there are to share about Jesus with others Through various courses and activities

May those activities have encouraged people To want to know more about Jesus In 2024 We pray that you will help us to know Jesus better And to make him known to others Who don't yet know him Our Lord, our saviour You are a faithful Kind, loving and compassionate God Forgive us for the many times in this last year When we've not shown those same qualities In the way we've lived our lives But give us a renewed desire to serve you And to walk with you more closely in the year ahead We pray all these things In the name of our Lord Jesus Amen Thank you Ian I'm going to sing again Jesus shall reign Where'er the sun Does its successive journey run His kingdom stretch From shore to shore Till sun shall rise And set no more Let's stand and sing And set no more Christ has said no more.

Blessings abound where'er he reigns. The prisoner lives to loose his chains.

The weary find eternal rest. And all the sons of want are blessed.

[ 53 : 53 ] To our King be highest praised. Rising through eternal days. Just and faithful he shall reign.

Jesus shall reign. People and realms of every tongue.

Dwell on his love with sweetest song. And infant voices shall proclaim.

Verily blessings on his name. To our King be highest praised.

Rising through eternal days. Just and faithful he shall reign.

[ 54 : 56 ] Jesus shall reign. Let every creature rise and bring blessing and honor to our King.

Angels descend with songs again. And that repeat the loud amen.

