

Love and passion, I share new-born King.

Love and passion, And worship Christ the new-born King.

[8 : 05] Saints before the halls of hand, Watching all the glory of Him, Shining the Lord, He's sending, In His faithful King.

Love and passion, I share new-born King.

Love and passion, Worship Christ the new-born King.

Grace, if you want to come up and help me. John 3.16 says this, For God so loved the world, That He gave His one and only Son, That whoever believes in Him, Shall not perish, But have eternal life.

As we light our fourth Advent candle today, We remember God's amazing love for us. The love that came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ. The unconditional love that is there as a gift for anyone who chooses to believe.

[9 : 40] The love that as Christians we can shine out to the world. And Grace is going to help light the candle, And then she's going to pray. So, if you come round this side, Grace. Oh, you go there. Oh.

And pray with that. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Amen. Thank you.

a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[11 : 41] Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Thank you. Come and see the inconceivable, and believe the unbelievable. God has come to dwell with us.

Come and see the inconceivable, and believe the unbelievable. God has come to dwell with us. God has come to dwell with us.

one fulfilling ancient words God has come to dwell with us Who could ever know the depths of the mystery of your grace Though our minds can't take it in Lord our hearts are filled with grace He will heal the unhealable He will save the unsavable God has come to dwell with us Heaven's joy will drink our bitter cup

[14 : 17] Empty doubts as He is lifted up God has come to dwell with us Who could ever know the depths of the mystery of your grace Who our minds can't take it in Though our hearts are filled with grace God has come to dwell with us Oh we're lost In overwhelming heart At the thought Of such amazing love God has come God has come God has come To dwell with us

This is the story of a birth. Come back, if you will, to a time before carefully structured birth plans, freely available epidurals, and a well-equipped team of fully qualified midwives.

Come to a manger. Come and see a mother whose nine months of pregnancy has ended in a cross-country census trip with no pre-arranged comfortable accommodation.

Just in case the baby comes at a bad time. Emperor Augustus had given orders for the names of all the people in the Roman Empire to be listed in record books.

Everyone had to go to their own hometown to be listed. For Joseph, along with his heavily pregnant fiancée Mary, that meant leaving Nazareth and trekking to Bethlehem.

[16 : 42] Bethlehem was the hometown of King David, and it wouldn't be long before it hosted the birth of an even greater king. This would be no easy birth, though.

Certainly not the birth we would expect a king to have. Alone and exhausted, unable to find room to stay in the inn, Mary and Joseph find shelter amongst the animals.

Mary gives birth to a son, wrapping him and laying him on a bed of hay. The king's first bed. No scales to weigh the pounds and ounces.

No family rushing to discover if he has his father's eyes. Just a couple, miles from home, eagerly anticipating who their baby would become.

No. Thank you.

[18 : 06] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

blankets.

I don't know if that applies to any of you. Maybe you're not so into the meat. Maybe for you, what really makes Christmas? Maybe you're more of a vegetable person. Maybe it's these guys. Is it the Brussels sprouts? I know that's quite a divisive issue.

So you might love it or hate it on that one. Maybe it's not about the food for you. Maybe for you, what really makes it Christmas is the favourite Christmas movie. Here are a couple of my favourites.

I'm sure you've got favourites in your household that you watch every year. Is that what makes it Christmas for you? Maybe it's about the time together. Maybe it's playing a family board game. Maybe it's the Christmas tree, beautifully decorated and gathering round that tree with presents underneath.

Or maybe for you, it's putting the Christmas cracker. Maybe that's what really makes it Christmas for you. What is it that really makes it Christmas? What's the essential thing? I suppose the obvious answer you would expect to hear from me in the context of a carol service at a church in which we've been singing about and hearing about the birth of Jesus is that it wouldn't be Christmas without Jesus.

[27 : 48] But let's face it. The reality in this country is that that is a minority view. And the majority of people who celebrate Christmas this year could have everything that they expect Christmas to be.

The turkey, the movie, the Christmas tree, the family gathering without any reference to Jesus. Or could they? Well, I'd like us to test that idea.

What if the account that we've heard this morning of Jesus being born in Bethlehem a little over 2,000 years ago, what if that didn't happen? I want to suggest to you that if that didn't happen, the world that we live in would be a very different place today.

Because the culture that we live in and the values that we collectively hold have been profoundly shaped by the movement that sprung out of the life of that baby who was born in Bethlehem.

The author, Glenn Scrivener, says, If you're a 21st century Westerner, whether you've ever stepped foot inside a church building, whether you consider yourself a pagan or humanist or atheist, Christianity is the water in which you swim.

[28 : 58] What he means is that in so many aspects of our life, so many aspects of our life and things that we value, so many of them exist because of the revolution that sparked from the birth and life and death of Jesus.

Let me give you some examples. If you've been taught how to read, if you've ever voted in an election for a leader, if you've ever received medical care in a doctor's surgery or a hospital, if you've had access to a school or workplace or public building, no matter your gender, colour, sexuality or social class, if you've felt a sense of injustice at news reports of civilians who've been killed or injured in conflicts and wars around the world, if you've ever voted in an election for a few years or two years or two years or two years or two years or two years or two years or two years. If you have the freedom to choose how you celebrate this Christmas, if any of those statements apply, then you have gained something from the revolution which was begun by Jesus Christ.

Let me just dig into a couple of those ideas. Let's start with the idea of equality. It's been interesting in recent days following the COVID inquiry, observing politicians and other experts being questioned about decisions that they made, which were based on judgments about the value of human life.

And these questions are being asked because we believe in equality, in the sense that no one person is more valuable than another because they have more money or more strength or more intelligence.

[30 : 31] Everyone is equal in having the same rights to health care and basic needs, no matter their race, religion, gender and so on. However, back through history in pre-Christian and non-Christian cultures, this notion of equality would have seemed a crazy idea.

The philosopher Plato and his students are considered the fathers of Western philosophy. But Plato would be baffled by the assumption we hold today that all lives are valuable.

It was obvious to him that all lives were of unequal value. He writes, Nature herself intimates that it is just for the better to have more than the worse, the more powerful than the weaker.

Justice consists in the superior ruling over and having more than the inferior. His view was shared by most people in history up to that point. The view that there were superior races, a superior sex and superior classes.

And weaker or less superior people were simply expendable. Plato wrote about children that in order to be worth rearing, children must be malleable, disposed to virtue and physically fit.

[31 : 49] He states that if they did not prove themselves worthy, parents would properly dispose of them in secrets so that no one will know what has become of them. This was common practice in the time of Plato.

Plato. And it's shocking for us to hear today. Because our moral imperative is to protect the weak, not eliminate them. But down through history, the vast majority of cultures have considered that we're all better off without the weak.

And yet we now live in a world where we have underlying moral assumptions woven into the fabric of our society about the value of human life, about human rights, about equality and the imperative to protect the weak.

How did this change? Where has our modern belief in equality and human value come from? Well, it's not from science, although science has taught us a great deal.

Science can tell us a lot. It can tell us a lot about what's physical, what's natural. It can tell us that we share 40% of our DNA with bananas. It can tell us the chemical composition of our bodies.

[32 : 54] But based on that, we'd only be worth a few pounds each in terms of our raw chemical ingredients. Science doesn't tell us anything about our equal status in relation to each other.

And yet we all recognize that every human has value that transcends their material makeup or their economic usefulness. This idea of the value of a human has to have come from outside of us.

And if you look back, you can trace it back to the biblical account of a loving God who created humans in his image for a relationship with him.

That's why we have this idea of being equally valuable, because we're equally valuable to God. The Bible shows us that humans tragically rebelled against the creator God, breaking their relationship with him, and chaos then ensued.

But the creator God, who values humans so much, became one to save us. That's the Christian story. That's the Christmas story. God who loves us so much that he would lower himself to be born as one of us, to live as one of us, and to die for us, to restore our relationship with God the Father.

[34 : 12] John's Gospel tells us, The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. This is where we see the word, the idea, the message of who God is, and our value in God's eyes.

We see this idea or this ideal fuse with the real, the flesh, the human, the physical, in the person of Jesus. While natural selection means survival of the fittest and sacrifice of the weakest or least worthy, Christianity is about the sacrifice of the fittest, the most worthy, Jesus Christ, for the survival of the weakest, the least worthy, us.

Jesus taught and demonstrated in his life and in his death the inherent value of every human. Now we may not recognise it, but this Christian idea of every human having equal value, made in the image of God, is right at the root of our modern view of the world.

Since the birth and life and death of Jesus onwards, previously held assumptions have been replaced with a moral framework which is modelled on his life and death and teaching.

So back to our original question. It wouldn't be Christmas without... And if we took Jesus out of history, the fact that it wouldn't be Christmas would actually be the least of our concerns.

[35 : 41] Because without Jesus, it wouldn't be what we know and cherish as Western civilisation. And we wouldn't have human rights. And we wouldn't have equality.

And we wouldn't have healthcare for everyone. And we wouldn't have democracy. In other words, it wouldn't be the world as we know it, with all the values that we take for granted, without Jesus.

The trouble is, most of the time, we don't realise where our moral values have come from. We don't recognise the water that we're swimming in. In 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed by the founders of the United States of America.

It stated, I should have given that in an American accent, but it's not very good.

Now, the interesting historical caveat around that document is that this isn't what it said in the original draft. Thomas Jefferson, its author, originally wrote, We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable.

[37 : 02] Sacred and undeniable. But he sent his draft to Benjamin Franklin, asking him to review the draft. Now, you can see pictures of this online, of the original handwritten documents, with the corrections and with the edits.

See, Franklin, among other edits, he put a line through sacred and undeniable, and he replaced it with self-evidence. Now, on the surface, it's just a minor change of language. But this is a powerful metaphor of what the West has done, which is to take hold of truths which are essentially sacred in nature. They're grounded not in reason, but in a Christian worldview. Jefferson was right. He said, These are sacred truths. They're not self-evident at all. But by the time Franklin got hold of his draft, these ideas had been so thoroughly baked into Western society that he could say, self-evident, and everyone said, Yeah, that sounds about right. And this is one illustration of the way in which our modern Western society has said, We'll keep the Christian assumptions, but we're going to gradually try and remove the foundations that got us here.

[38 : 10] It's like the child on Christmas Day, when in the frenzy of unwrapping presents, they unwrap a wonderful toy, and they spend the rest of the Christmas holidays playing with this amazing toy. But they have no idea, and the parents have no idea, who gave it to them, because the gift tag has been lost in all the mess of the wrapping paper.

Now, you don't have to take my word for it. You can read the secular historian, Tom Holland, who explains in his best-selling book, Dominion, that our most cherished modern values depend on Jesus Christ.

He explains that throughout history, it was only as Christianity spread that these beliefs in human equality and rights became generally accepted. The ancient Greeks and Romans would have laughed at them.

Now, even if historians agree that our moral building blocks came to us from Christianity, it's very tempting to us to think these days that we can keep these values that we cherish while removing the claims about Jesus himself.

We like to think that we can build a moral high tower without God. But it's like playing Jenga, taking blocks out of the bottom of the tower to make it higher and higher.

[39 : 21] Sooner or later, the Jenga tower collapses. If we ignore the foundations of our moral fabric, we don't just lose our morality, we lose our sense of meaning. And I would encourage you to reflect on this, this Christmas.

You may not believe in God, but I'm going to guess that you believe in equality and human rights and care for the weakest in society. If the birth and life and death of this one man has had such a powerful, transforming impact on our world and on our culture, could it also transform your life? That has been my story. That's my experience. Getting to know Jesus for myself, the man who's transformed the course of history, has given my life meaning and purpose and made sense of the world around me and given me a hope for the future.

I would commend you to discover Jesus for yourself this Christmas. Please come and talk to me afterwards. Talk to any of our leaders. Talk to the person that you came with.

We'd also love to invite you to a great opportunity to discuss and explore the claims of Jesus on a short course we're running in the new year called Christianity Explored. Everyone is welcome and it's a great place to ask whatever questions that you have about what Christians believe in a very friendly and informal environment.

[40 : 42] You can sign up online or do please take one of these flyers from the table by the door on your way out. Thank you for listening.

In a moment, the choir are going to sing to us a carol called The Truth From Above. It's not a carol that mentions holly and all the trimmings of Christmas but it mentions the truth, the biblical history that has transformed our culture and history from the creation of the world, God creating humans in his image, humans rebelling against God and God acting to save us by sending Jesus.

Before the choir sing to us, let me pray. Dear God, we thank you for the birth of your son Jesus, for his life and for his sacrificial death and the way that has changed the course of history.

We pray that you would help us to understand how Jesus' life and death transformed our culture and our values and we pray that you would help us to understand how Jesus can transform our lives today.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[42 : 00] This is the truth sent from above, the truth of God, the God of love.

Therefore, don't turn me from your door, but hearken all both rich and poor. The first thing which we do relate is that God did not create.

The next thing which to you will tell, the world was made with him to dwell.

In paradise all evil three, except they ate of such a tree.

And those they ruined it begin, and brought us on by the power of sin.

[43 : 18] But we were heirs to endless woes, till God the Lord did interpose.

For so a promise soon did run, that he would redeem us by his Son.

And that this season of the year, a blessed Redeemer did appear.

He did live, and did it preach. And many thousands he did teach.

Must he in love to us today, to show us how we must be saved.

[44 : 24] And if he wants to know the way, be pleased to hear what he did say.

God grant to all within this place, true saving faith, that special grace, which to his people doth belong.

And thus I close my Christmas song. God grant to all the people of God.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[46 : 21] Holy night, shepherds quake at the skies.

Glory, strength of heaven afar. Let ye hope sing hallelujah.

Christ the Savior is born. Christ the Savior is born.

Silent night, holy night. Son of God, bless your light.

Great and peace, my glory face. With the dawn of saving grace.

[47 : 36] Jesus, Lord, at thy birth. Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

The absence of light.

The loss of direction. No frame of reference. The presence of fear and uncertainty.

Void. And then, a light. It starts as a flicker.

It's not glaring for all to see. But it's a light nonetheless. Beautiful and mysterious.

[49 : 01] Helping us to see. Guiding us. Warming us. Comforting us. It is growing.

It is shining brighter now. In one timeless moment. Something of heaven is birthed through the tears of a teenage girl.

And the cry of a newborn baby king. All of heaven is perched at the edge of the sky. Watching. Waiting.

Waiting. God is sending the light of heaven into the dark of this world. To the young.

To the old. To the weak. To the strong. To the lost. To the found.

[50 : 06] He is coming to us. He is walking with us. He is dying for us. He is living in us.

Our unthinkable darkness is being shattered by unbearable light. And we gather to see. To view with fresh eyes again.

The light that all the darkness in the world cannot ever extinguish. Jesus is the light of the world.

This baby was the promised king.

This baby was one with God. This baby was God. From the very beginning. This baby. The word of life.

Was with God. And nothing was made without him. Everything that was created. Received its life from him. He has shone his light into this dark world.

[51 : 29] And the darkness. Has never been able to put it out. A man named Simeon. Was living in Jerusalem. At the time of Jesus' birth. And he loved and trusted God.

Waiting for him to save the people of Israel. God's spirit had promised him that he would not die.

Until he had seen Christ the Lord.

Imagine his astonishment and joy. When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple. Simeon took the baby in his arms and praised God.

Saying. Lord. I am your servant. And now I can die in peace. Because you have kept your promise to me. With my own eyes.

I have seen what you have done. To save your people. And all foreign nations. Your mighty power. Is a light for all the nations. And it will bring honor to your people Israel.

[52 : 30] He spoke of the light and power that had been promised. The same light that had shone in the darkness. Through all eternity. But he made it clear to Mary.

That Jesus would not be received by everyone as he deserved. He told her. This child of yours. Will cause many people in Israel to fall.

And others. To stand. Jesus would divide people. Of all nations. For not all people. Would see him for who he is.

Not all people would accept the light. Not all people. Would welcome the word. Even though this word. Gave life to the world.

Gave life to the people of the world. Many would not recognize. Welcome. Or accept him. Yet some people would.

[53 : 26] Accept him. And put their faith in him. And to those. He would give the right. To become the children of God. Not through anything they had done.

But through the loving mercy. Of their heavenly father. The word has come. And we have seen his true glory. The glory of the only son of the father.

A glory that shines today. As it has shone through all eternity. From this son. All the kindness and truth of God.

Has come down to us. God's light. And God's word. Is with us. Let's come to God in prayer.

Almighty God. Our heavenly father. In this season.

[54 : 32] When every heart. Should be happy. And light. Many are struggling. With the heaviness of life. Burdens that steal the joy. From our Christmas celebrations.

We sing the wonderful message. Of God coming to dwell with us. His heavenly light. Beautiful. And mysterious. Shining into the darkness of this world.

In the person of Jesus. And yet we confess. That our hearts are too often filled. With worry. Fear. Despair.

Hopelessness. Unbelief. Where darkness prevails. Shine your true light. We pray. The light which all the darkness in the world.

Cannot ever extinguish. The light which brings peace. Joy. Hope. And love. This Christmas. Make it real in our hearts.

[55 : 34] Thank you for the gift of Jesus. God with us. The word made flesh. Forgive us. Forgive us. For forgetting. Forgive us. For forgetting.

That your love never changes. Never fades. And that you never abandon. The purpose. For which you came. To save us. From our sinful condition. And to give us.

Life. Eternal. The joy. Of relationship. With a holy God. Your birth. And your death. Sealed. Your promise. To us.

Forever. Forever. We pray. For those dealing with financial worries. Unemployment. Addictions. Sickness.

Pain. And frustrations. Of all kinds. For those who are experiencing bereavement and loss. This Christmas. For those whose hearts are battered by sorrow.

[56 : 33] Or broken relationships. For those whose lives know only conflict and confusion. For those whose very existence has been shattered by the horrors of war.

Precious Saviour, draw them close to you. Let them know you. You are still the same Jesus. The one sent by a heavenly Father.

Who offered not condemnation for our sins. But love and forgiveness. You've promised rest for the weary. Peace for the anxious.

Hope for those in despair. And acceptance for the broken hearted. Not just at Christmas. But every day of the year. Show us again the beauty of that holy night.

So many centuries ago. We cry out for a fresh filling. And a new awareness of who you are. We choose by faith to make the good news of great joy.

[57 : 40] A reality in our own lives. So others can see us pointing to you this Christmas. We know one day that every knee will bow. And every tongue will confess that you are Lord.

And yet. We also know that peace on earth can only come. When human hearts find peace with you. You are no longer a baby in the manger.

You are Lord of Lords and King of Kings. And we worship you Lord Jesus. This Christmas and always. Amen.

We have a few notices before we sing again. Our Christmas offering this year is going to Embrace.

Which is a local charity partnering with Christians in the Middle East. As they work to transform lives. And restore the dignity of the most excluded and marginalized communities.
[58 : 43] Regardless of race or religion. Their partners are working to bring support to people most impacted by the current crisis. And this includes running psychological interventions for children and mothers.

As well as fun activities for children. To help alleviate the psychological pressure they have as a result of their traumatic experiences. They distribute hygiene kits.
And organize health awareness sessions. And they're providing primary health care. In distributing medicines at their RAFA clinic. Please consider giving an online donation.

As your expression of thankfulness this Christmas. Our Christmas services. Our next Sunday. There is no in-person service here in the morning.

On the 24th. There is an online service. Which you can access on the website. And YouTube. And that will start at 10.15. You can watch it after. In the afternoon.

[59 : 45] We have our Christingle service. At 4 o'clock. You need to book online for this. And its places are going fast. So if you want to come. Please make sure you've booked online. And also we welcome you to our Christmas Day celebration.

Which will be on Monday. The 25th of December. At 10.15. No need to book online for this one. Just come along. Thank you. After this service.

There will be refreshments. Down in the main hall. And we hope you will be able to join us. And spend some time together. Talking then. We're going to sing our final song now.

Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Glory to a new young King.

His men and mercy mild. God and sinners reconciled. Joyful all the nations rise, joyful triumph of the skies.

[61 : 11] With the miracles proclaim, Christ is born and path began. God, the herald we shall sing, how we do the new long day.

Christ, the highest

■ Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. May the blessing of his peace rest upon you. May the blessing of his joy fill you. May the blessing of his love flow out through you. And may you be filled with thanks and praise to our heavenly father who loved the world enough to send the greatest gift, his son, so that you might truly know the joy of Christmas. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.