

Christmas Presence

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[0 : 0 0] Hello, everybody. First of all, I have a Christmas card to read that Carl gave me. It's from John and Gwyneth Cooper, whom many of you will know, or perhaps not many now, perhaps it's a minority, but there's certainly a lot here who will remember them.

John preached for Whitby Christian Fellowship and played the keyboard and the piano. Gwyneth did Sunday school and a terrific amount of pastoral work. If people were ill, she'd leave a dinner on their doorstep in a pot, not just a pile of dinner on the doorstep.

So she really did an awful lot in the church over the years. And then they left a long time ago now. They went off to Thailand originally and did some work out there at a school teaching English.

And they're now in the south of England. But they say, to all at Whitby Christian Fellowship, whom we know and love, with best wishes for Christmas and the New Year, and may God be with each and every one of you for the season and 2025, bringing peace, love, joy and hope, much love from John and Gwyneth.

So first slide, please, Josh. Or whoever's doing the slide. Yes, thank you. Right, so just three sleeps to go. So I guess there's a lot of excitement in some households.

[1 : 1 9] I think particularly the winter household, where Lisa, of course, will have been getting excited since Boxing Day of last year. In fact, she'd said to Anne this morning, Anne had said, I suppose you're all set, Lisa.

And Lisa said, well, that's what happens when you're excited for such a long time. Everything's ready and done. So there we are. So yes, so a sense of excitement. Can you put the next slide, please?

Are we excited? Are we feeling a sense of anticipation about Christmas? Now, people here today and people elsewhere, some will be excited about Christmas, like my son used to be when he was little.

Santa used to leave a stocking on the bed just after, you know, late in the night. And one night we were asleep and we suddenly heard this rustling going on at about a minute past midnight.

And we went along the corridor and there was Joel in his stocking, tangerine ripped open, you know, enjoying it. So he was excited. There's no doubt about that. But other people would be feeling anticipation.

[2 : 2 6] And anticipation is not the same always, is it, as excitement. You know, excitement is excitement. You're keyed up. You want it to happen. You're looking forward to it. But anticipation can be that.

But it can also be a sense of not looking forward to it, of not being excited, of anticipating something that does not bring you joy and happiness. And my mother was a bit like that. She enjoyed a very, very happy childhood and Christmases.

But when her marriage went wrong to my dad, that really affected her, especially at Christmastime. She would look back and remember the happy Christmases.

And, you know, she, sadly, she wallowed in that nostalgia a bit. But she would look back. And so she anticipated Christmas, but not in a good way.

And there are people here, I guess, who will be thinking in the same way, who might not be excited about Christmas, who will be anticipating it. And we need to just pause sometimes and think, you know, amidst all of that excitement that's going on in the shops and on television and films and whatever else, that it isn't always like that for everyone, is it?

[3 : 35] So a sense of excitement and a sense of anticipation. Next slide please, shall we? So, what can we predict about our Christmas Day?

Well, I think there's, you know, a few things we can predict. We'll open presents. We'll give presents. We'll eat our Christmas lunch. We'll wear a silly hat, probably.

A silly hat or two. We'll pull a cracker or two. We'll eat Christmas cake. Probably have a snooze, some of us. Listen to the king's speech.

It still seems strange saying that. You know, listen to the king's speech. It just doesn't somehow seem right after listening to the queen for so many years. But we'll listen to the king's speech and go to church.

Not necessarily in that order. But those are some of the things we can say. Fairly generic predictions for our Christmas Day. You know, which may not be accurate for everybody.

[4 : 30] But I think overall, that's more or less what most of us will be doing on Christmas Day. Next slide, please. But what about the very specific predictions or rather prophecies?

Because there is a difference between prediction and prophecy. Prediction is a man-made thing. Prediction is man using logic to look ahead and say, well, yeah, I think that there'll be this and this and this.

But prophecy is the word of God. The word of God that comes and speaks something about the future that will be fulfilled.

And this, especially at this time, the prophecies about the coming of Jesus Christ. The Messiah, Emmanuel, God with us. Well, here are 14 of those now.

And I'm not going to read everyone out. So for those of you who have your Cracker Jack pen and pencil set, that's for those who don't understand what Cracker Jack is.

[5 : 29] Well, I tell them. Nobody shouted Cracker Jack. That's a bit disappointing. Thank you. Yes. So here are 14 of those prophecies from the Old Testament, which were fulfilled in the New Testament.

So, Messiah would be born of a woman. God said, I will put enmity between your offspring and hers.

Now, that's, I'm going to focus on three of these prophecies later on. And I'd like to come back. That's one of them that I'd like to come back to. So, Messiah would come from the line of Abraham, Genesis 12, 3.

All peoples on earth, they'll be blessed through you. All peoples on earth will be blessed through Abraham. Messiah would be a descendant of Isaac, Genesis 17 and 19.

With him, an everlasting covenant, an everlasting covenant for his descendants. Messiah would be from the tribe of Judah, Genesis 49 and 10.

[6 : 35] Scepter will not depart from Judah until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. That's Jesus coming.

The Messiah would be a descendant of Jacob, Numbers 24, 7. A star will come out of Jacob. And then we move forward in time.

Those ones were back, the early ones, back really at creation and just beyond creation. We're now moving forward. Messiah would be the heir to King David's throne.

And this is, again, one of the other ones that I'll come back to. 2 Samuel 7, 12 and 13. From about 1010 to 970 BC.

That's when these events were taking place. It says, Your offspring, I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. That's David's offspring.

[7 : 32] God will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. Moving forward again, 300 years. Closer. Messiah would spend a season in Egypt.

Hosea 11, 1 says, And out of Egypt I called my son. Just as the Israelites were in Egypt, so the Messiah was in Egypt and called out.

And we have that in the New Testament, that they had to flee to Egypt to escape the persecution that was being carried out by Herod of the children. They had to flee to Egypt.

And there it is foretold in Hosea 11, 1. And out of Egypt I called my son. Messiah would be born of a virgin. Here we are. Around 740, Isaiah.

The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son. And the next verse, Messiah would be called Emmanuel.

[8 : 33] Emmanuel. And we'll call him Emmanuel. God with us. A messenger would prepare the way for Jesus. Isaiah 14, verses 3 to 5.

A voice of one calling. In the desert, prepare the way. And there was John the Baptist, of course, in the New Testament, eating his diet of locusts and wild honey.

Out in the desert, preparing the way for Jesus. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Micah 5 and verse 2. 722, 721 BC now.

Bethlehem, out of you. For me, ruler over Israel. And then in Jeremiah 31, 15. Mother of the children at Messiah's birthplace.

Rachel weeping because her children are no more. And this is 627. That's an interesting one. Because Rachel was from the time when Jacob was about to be renamed Israel.

[9 : 41] So, can you just go back there, Shelley, to that one? Rachel weeping for her children. When Jeremiah spoke this, the Israelites were in captivity in Babylon, about to go into captivity in Babylon.

But Rachel had been long dead. Long dead. And yet here was Jeremiah talking about Rachel. And then in the New Testament, there's this talk about Rachel weeping for her children.

And Rachel is seen as the matriarch of Israel. She was Jacob's wife. The mother of all Israel.

And so that's why it's looking back at how she would be in her grave when Jeremiah wrote this. But she was the mother of Israel. And it was this allusion to her being so upset at her children being in exile originally.

Originally exile in Egypt. Then exile in Babylon. And then the coming of Jesus. The coming of the Messiah.

[10 : 49] So not just the loss and the grief. But the hope and the expectation. The hope and the expectation. That the exiles would end.

The exile from Egypt. The exile from Babylon. The time would come when those would end. And here was the hope and expectation in the New Testament. When it says Rachel weeping. That that time would pass.

And the Messiah would come. The next slide please. Messiah's throne will be anointed and eternal. Daniel chapter 2 and verse 44. Excuse me.

Verse 44. God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. The God of heaven. The anointed God. Will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

The eternal kingdom. The Messiah would be preceded by a forerunner. Again Malachi 3 and verse 1. I will send my messenger. Prepare the way for me.

[11 : 46] And that was 444 to 432 BC roughly. And then there were 400 years of silence. The 400 years of silence.

Malachi. All the prophets had spoken. What was to be spoken. What was to be prophesied. And then there was 400 years of silence. Before the Messiah came. We don't know all the.

Anything really about that. 400 years of silence. But. We know that. God's plans. Are right. God's plans are true.

Whatever God's plan was. The prophets at that point. Had spoken all that God wanted to say. The Israelites had heard God's word. They'd listened to him. They'd obeyed.

They'd disobeyed. They'd obeyed. They'd disobeyed. They'd obeyed. And then at this point. They weren't only disobeying. But they were actually blaming God. For their situation.

[12 : 44] So there was silence for 400 years. So that's the prophecies. 14 prophecies. Specific prophecies. Fulfilled in the New Testament. About Jesus coming.

And that's to say. Nothing of. The prophecies that talk about. Him being the son of God. Speaking in parables. Healing the broken hearted. Entering Jerusalem on a donkey. Being betrayed.

Being crucified. Being sacrificed for sin. Being raised from the dead. Hallelujah. Ascending to heaven. And returning. For a second time. All of those prophecies.

Some scholars say. There are 300 prophecies. In the Old Testament. About Jesus coming. And Jesus life. Next slide please.

So I just want to look at. Three of these prophecies. So the first one is. That man would be born of woman. In Genesis 3.15. It says. And I will put enmity.

[13 : 40] Between you. And the woman. And between your offspring. And her offspring. He will bruise. And tread your head. Underfoot. And you will lie in wait.

And bruise his feet. His heel. And in the New Testament. Matthew 1.20-21. Says. Take Mary as your wife. What is conceived in her.

Is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth. Now that. Section from Genesis. Is called. The Proto. Evangelius.

Which is Greek. For proto. Meaning first. And evangelius. Good news. So. It's the first time. In the Bible. And how early is it?

It's so early. That the woman. Hasn't even got a name yet. That's how early it is. And it's talking about. Jesus. Coming. It talks about enmity.

[14 : 36] Between. You and the woman. Satan. And the woman. Between Satan's offspring. And her offspring. That enmity. Notice. It doesn't.

Put the woman. With Satan. It doesn't say. That you will be with Satan. There will be enmity. Between you. And that's what's happened.

Isn't it? The enmity. Between us. And. God. Through Satan. And. He will bruise. And tread your head under foot.

And you will lie in weight. And bruise his heel. And there's Jesus. Having his heel bruised. By Satan. Had his heel bruised.

By Satan. When he went to the cross. Satan thought. I've got him. I've got him here. He's going to die. He's going to be crucified. Satan bruised his heel.

[15 : 31] But Jesus. Rose again. On the third day. And crushed Satan's head. Satan doesn't know it. But his head is crushed.

His head is. Stood under foot. That was a lethal blow. To Satan. When Jesus. Conquered death. And so there it is. The first.

Good news. The first mention. Of the gospel. And then it was only a little later. We read that. The woman was called Eve.

Which meant. Live. And she became. Mother of all the living. And there we are. There's the link. Mother of all the living. Next slide please.

Messiah would be heir to King David's throne. Now here. I've made a. Not a mistake. But I had a. A quote from 2 Samuel. But this quote from Isaiah 9.7.

[16 : 29] Is. Is the same. It's the. It's the same. Prophecy. Of the increase 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. And in the New Testament.

Luke says. The Lord God. Will give him the throne. Of his father David. And he will reign forever. His kingdom. Will never end.

And that passage from Isaiah. Of course. Is preceded by. Unto us a son is given. I had the joy. This week. Of watching. One of my granddaughter's. Nativity service.

And she's seven. And she read that passage. Unto us a son is given. Unto us a child is born. And it took me right back. Because. I read that passage. When I was about seven.

[17 : 27] At our nativity service. In church. When I was at junior school. And that was quite a. A sort of lump in the throat. Moment really. But that. That. Prophecy of Isaiah.

That here was. The descendant of David. Who would come. And who would be on the throne. Forever. And of course. If you look in Matthew.

You've got the. Genealogy. Of Jesus. 14 generations. From Abraham. To David. Obed was the father of.

Jesse. Jesse was the father of. David. And then. 14 generations there. Until the exile. Into Babylon. Where it says. Josiah was the father.

Of Jeconiah. And then they go into exile. And then. 14 generations later. Matan. Was the father of Jacob. Who was the father of Joseph. Who was the father of Jesus.

[18 : 23] So there's Jesus. Human. Genealogy. Coming through Joseph. And he was on the throne. He will be on the throne. Forever. Next slide please.

And the Messiah. Will be born in Bethlehem. Micah 5. 2 says. But you Bethlehem. Out of you. Will come. One. Who will be ruler over Israel. Whose origins are.

From ancient times. And Luke 2. 4 to 6. Says. The first census. There was the first census. And so. Joseph also went up.

To Bethlehem. Because he belonged. To the house and line. Of David. Went with Mary. The time came. For the baby. To be born. So there we are.

We're told. That the Messiah. Out of you. Bethlehem. Will come one. Who will be. Who will rule over Israel. And here we are. With Jesus.

[19 : 19] About to be born. About to presence himself. With us. Next slide please. Shall we. So. What about heaven? If we're. Excitedly.

Anticipating Christmas. What about heaven? Well. I would think the archangels. And the angels. Would be. Can you imagine Gabriel. When you know. God called him. And said. Right Gabriel. I've got a couple of important jobs.

For you here. I want you to go and see Zachariah. And tell him. That Elizabeth. Who's barren. Is going to have a baby. And he's going to be the forerunner. Of the Messiah.

The time's come. I'm putting into place. My plan. So. Are you right. Are you all right. With this Gabriel. So off Gabriel goes. He gets back. And then he's told.

Gabriel. I've got another little job. For you here. Said. Oh yeah. What's that. You know. Well. He said. There's a virgin. Mary. Who's betrothed to Joseph. I want you to go and tell her. That she's going to have a baby.

[20 : 16] It's not going to be to Joseph. No. It's going to be through the Holy Spirit. Through my Holy Spirit. And this is to be. The Messiah. Are you all right with that one? Yeah.

Pretty exciting stuff. Isn't it? You know. Pretty exciting stuff. And what about Zechariah and Elizabeth? Elizabeth was barren. Zechariah there. Just sort of minding his own business in the temple.

Clearing up. Suddenly he's told. Oh. Your wife is going to have a baby. Who will go out and foretell of Jesus the Messiah. I don't believe it.

Bump. You're blind. Blind until the birth. He'd be excited. He'd be a little frightened. Be a little worried. But. And Elizabeth.

What excitement for her. And so exciting when Mary then came to see her. And the baby leapt in the womb. You know. The excitement. The excitement of Mary and Joseph.

[21 : 12] You know. The worry. The trepidation. But deep inside. The belief that this was God. Through his Holy Spirit. Putting Jesus in Mary's womb.

To be born. Of a woman. Quite exciting stuff. And then. He says. Right. You know. We'll organize a census.

Get on and on. We'll make sure there's a census organized here. So it can be in Bethlehem. I want them to be in Bethlehem. You know. So. Everything's arranged. The census is put in place.

So Joseph has to go. To his birth town. Back to his. The town that his descendants come from. From Bethlehem. The innkeeper. You know.

Setting the innkeeper. In the right place. No rooms to spare. But that innkeeper. Who put in his mind. Well. I've got a stable.

[22 : 09] And they can go into the stable. I don't have any rooms. You know. But they have a stable. If they're all right in there. They can go in there. How exciting. For that innkeeper.

How exciting. For the shepherds. You know. He gets hold of. God gets hold of the heavenly host. And says. Right. I want you to go down. There's going to be some shepherds on a hillside. Washing their socks. I want you to go down. And appear before them.

And tell of the glory of the Lord. How exciting is that for those shepherds? They didn't know. But suddenly. There was the heavenly host. Sent by God. Well done chaps.

All there. Singing the praises of God. To those shepherds. Involved. Involved. In the greatest story of all time. And the wise men. Right.

I'm going to put a star in the sky. And then there's some wise men going to come. We don't know how many. It might have been three. It might have been four. We don't know. They're going to come. And pay homage to the child.

[23 : 06] They're going to bring gifts to the child. So let's get that star in price. Here's the heavenly host looking. And there's a star in the sky. This is. This is wonderful. What exciting news. So yes.

I think there would have been quite a lot of excitement in heaven. About this at the time. This was the fulfillment. Of God's master plan. To offer salvation. To all mankind.

And. To presence himself with us. Christmas presents. Presents in God. With us. Next slide please. Christmas is a time of waiting.

Watching. Longing. Yearning. And anticipation. That something is going to happen. Isn't it? On a human level. You know. We know something is going to happen. We hope we're going to get a present. Made for a present from Auntie Gloria.

Or whatever it might be. Another pair of socks. But we always need socks. But there's something going to happen. So it is. As we look ahead. Now. At this time.

[24 : 00] Three days to go. We look ahead. Something exciting is going to happen. And it happens every Christmas. We have this chance. To be excited. And to look forward.

And to anticipate. Excitedly. The coming of Jesus. Be alert. To what God is doing. We have a chance. To be alert. To what God is doing.

Because this is Emmanuel. God with us. God with us. The Old Testament prophecies. Remind us of this. And how God. At Christmas.

Is providing. The ultimate way. Back to him. God is sending his son. Jesus. To presence himself. With us. To eventually.

Go to the cross. And to die. For our sin. And then to be raised to life. God's master plan.

[24 : 55] Was set in motion. As he looked. And said. Right. This is it. 400 years of silence. But all that's been foretold.

About my son coming. Is now. Starting to be put. In place. God is with us. And God is with us. In the times of excitement. And beauty.

And the wonder of Christmas. And it is. The wonder of Christmas. This wonder. That God. Sent his son. For us. But he's also with us. In the stressful.

Heartbreaking. Worrying. Doubting. Times of Christmas. God's still there. If you're. Concerned about Christmas.

If you're worried about Christmas. If you're sad about Christmas. If your heart's broken. God knows. And God is there. You can turn to him.

[25 : 50] And he will help. He is there. To turn to. Turn to him. Don't reject him. Don't reject him.

At Christmas. This is the time. When you really need. To look into your heart. And think. God is present. With us. Don't let me ignore him. God is.

With us. For eternity. Not just for Christmas. There's a bumper sticker. Next slide please. God is not.

A remote God. He's with us. The prophecies foretell him. He comes. At Christmas. He is Emmanuel. He is God.

With us. Never forget. The presence of Jesus. This Christmas. And I just want to finish. With a quote from 2 Timothy. And I've added some chapters there.

[26 : 47] To 2 Timothy. Those with a sharp eye will notice. It isn't actually 9 and 10. It's 2 Timothy 1. Verses 9 and 10. This grace was given us. In Christ Jesus. Before the beginning of time.

But it has now been revealed. Through the appearing. Of our Savior Jesus. Christ Jesus. Who has destroyed death. And has brought life. And immortality to light.

Through. The gospel. That gospel. That was first foretold. In Genesis. The first. Word.

The first gospel. Is now with us. Have a lovely Christmas. Jesus.