

Carols after Work (whole service - starts with quiet background music)

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Date: 22 December 2005

Preacher: Alex Bedford

[0 : 00] Good evening friends, it's good to see you. I've just seen a minister, Dr. Willie Phillip and he told me to introduce myself at the beginning. So, my name's Alex Bedford and I'm employed here by the congregation of St. George's Tron Church and I have the most amazing job in the world. They actually pay me to talk about Jesus and I can't think of a better job than that. I don't know if you'd like to know anything else about me. I used to race motorcycles for a living back in the distant past and then I had a motorcycle business and I was eventually converted and I went to college down in London, a Bible college and then I came up here to work with St. George's Tron Church. So, it's great to see you, young and old. I know we've got a baby over there, a young lady over there and we've got another girl who's two and a half somewhere. So, it's good to see you, young and old and we meet together here in the city centre tonight to remember the birth of Jesus Christ and we'll be doing that through carols that we'll be singing and the scripture that we'll be looking at in the Bible. So, as we begin we'll ask God for his help.

Dear Heavenly Father, we pray that you'd presence yourself with us this evening. That Father, we'd encounter your Son through your Spirit. And our prayer is that you'd help us to set aside all the things that might be milling around in our minds just now. Possibly things from work, situations, things that are maybe unresolved, maybe relationship issues. Just pray that you'd help us to set those aside for the time being and draw close to us through your Spirit. And we pray Father that as an assembly, as a church and through your Word and through your Spirit, we pray that you'd be close to us and reveal things to us. We ask that you'll use this carol service and place it in your eternal purposes for our lives. And we ask in Christ's name, Amen. Amen. Our first carol takes us from Glasgow to Bethlehem. It takes us from the 21st century back to the 1st century. It takes us from all those cars going past outside through those windows to the fields outside Bethlehem where the sheep are bleating, while shepherds watched their flocks by night. And after the introduction we stand to sing.

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[3 : 09]

Mother of the parlez Christ the Lord, and they shall be the child.

For every day to end your birth, to you and your disgrace. So live without his walking home, turning a manger away.

For every day to end your birth, to you and your grace. For every day to end your birth, to you and your grace.

For every day to end your birth, to you and your grace. And to you and your grace. To ever come from highest end, to you and your grace.

[4 : 55] And to end your birth, to you and your grace. So you sit down.

Our reading later on will be from Luke chapter 2. And the carol that we've just sung, it's already set the scene. Mary has given birth to her son and she's laid him in a manger outside of what, do you know?

Outside of an inn. And outside, they're in a small town. Do you know what the town's called, where the baby was born? Bethlehem, isn't it?

And can you see friends with your mind's eye? Can you just cast your mind back there and just think about what it would have been like? Just imagine it, a dark night. There'd be no electric

lighting.

So I guess the intensity of the lights would be maybe something like it is this evening. Perhaps, you know, the dull glow of an oil lamp flickering away.

[5 : 59] No central heating. No Queen Mum's Hospital. No paediatric team on hand to call in. Mary and Joseph, they gaze, don't they, at their newborn boy.

Perhaps there's muffled voices coming through those walls of the inn. And they're both perplexed. I'd be, wouldn't you? But, well, they're full of joy as their son lies there, wrapped in a manger. Outside, we move away, out of town and to the surrounding fields. Shepherds, they're outside of things in more ways than one. Back in the first century, shepherds had the cold shoulder by society. They were pushed aside. And Luke brings us a glimpse of a family outside of an inn. And a bunch of shepherds outside of the town.

God is at work on this night. He's breaking in. He's breaking in. Invading his world. And it's, listen, it's those on the outside who are on the inside.

[7 : 09] Our next carol is Hark the Herald Angels Sing. And it describes the angelic announcement to the shepherds. And after the carol, Agnes will come to bring us our reading.

So, once again, we stand after the introduction. Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

[9 : 12] Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

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Hark the Herald Angels Sing. Hark the Herald Angels Sing. And in the same region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

[10 : 28] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You will find a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

[11 : 34] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them.

Thank you, Agnes. Verse 8, and it's another night at the office, I take it, for the shepherds.

I guess it's very much like a motorway repair gang. You know, have you ever seen a motorway repair gang when you're zooming down the M74 or something, and they're working on the opposite carriageway?

I guess it was very much like that back then. You know, they worked together through the wee small hours. Verse 9, though. And God breaks in to their routine.

And when God, listen, when God reveals things to you, you're never the same again. Just listen to verse 9. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.

[12 : 46] The glory of the Lord shone around them, Luke tells us. And we get pictures of this in the Old Testament. Moses, for example, when he was met by God on Mount Horeb.

And the reaction, it's always the same. It always seems to be fear. Listen to this. And he said to them, fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. Two verses. A bunch of shepherds. And the thirst, listen, of the world is quenched.

Good news of great joy that will be for all people. For Glasgow in brackets. Now, friends, I don't know what you consider to be good news.

The elections, I think, in Iraq last week were good news. They seem to go quite well. And for those with investments, the UK stock market this year has been quite successful. So that's been good news.

[13:50] And a pay rise to take that news home. That's good news, isn't it? My colleague over there, David Robry, and his fiancée, Julie, they're getting married this time next week.

Isn't that good news? We can have a lot of good news. But the angels have in mind some sort of good news that, well, it takes it right off the scale.

This is the sort of good news it is. And their focus, their interest is in that stable back in Bethlehem. That's the focus of their interest.

And it seems that heaven has invaded the earth. And the focal point is this baby boy. A saviour, says the angel.

This is the good news of great joy. Onto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour. Friends, if this isn't the ultimate in good news for you, you know, if it doesn't take good news right off the scales into another realm entirely, it's because it's not quite sunk in yet.

[15:00] And so this evening, you're in the right place. Coming along here was the right thing to do. You see, when we have our Bibles open, we're sort of, listen, in the epicentre of good news.

Our next carol is, Joy to the World. And as we sing, I'd like you to notice, I'd like you to notice that the whole of the creation is rejoicing at the arrival of this saviour.

Friends, this is a cosmic good news of great joy. It's bigger, it's bigger than the lights on George Square. It's bigger than your office party.

It's cosmic, it's eternal, and it's from God. And it's for a bunch of shepherds. It's for people like me and you. Joy to the world.

And we'll stand after the introduction. Joy to the World Joy to the World And every life And every life Prepare His truth And certain things shall be And certain things shall be And certain things shall be And certain things shall be For joy And certain things shall be And little things eleventh ■'re

[17:03] Thank you.

CHOIR SINGS The wonders of His love, the wonders of His love, the wonders of His love.

So, well, we've had an angelic announcement, haven't we, about the birth of a Saviour. And I know what some of you are thinking. You're thinking, firstly, I'm not sure about angels.

And secondly, this Saviour business, is it just for the religious? It's not for me, surely. Now, friends, you might just now need to take a deep breath to get some oxygen flowing through, get some oxygen in the blood supply, because you'll need to concentrate hard for about three minutes.

I'm going to talk about the creation and its connection with angels and our need of a Saviour. So, the question is, what about those angels in Bethlehem?

[19:08] And do I, do I personally need a Saviour? We've got those two questions in mind. And the Bible answers both questions by declaring, listen, that this world that we're all perched on just now, this world, it didn't create itself.

It didn't spontaneously sort of come out of zero one morning, of its own volition, you know. Empirical science takes sort of stabs at the how questions.

But the why, the purpose question, is really off the radar screen of scientific investigation. And even in the field of the why questions, we're asked to believe some ingenious theories as to how matter came from no matter, and how the Newtonian laws of thermodynamics can be disregarded with regard to the creation, so that we can have things appearing from nothing, and filling themselves full of energy out of a resource of zero energy.

These are the sort of theories that sort of have to be made up to account for the creation that we're all perched on. And of course, these grand theories, they continually need to be discarded in the light of further investigation, further empirical research.

Last year, for example, do we know Professor Stephen Hawking? Well, last year, he had to discard his early theory about black holes. I'll just read this to you.

[20 : 45] It's from the BBC on the 22nd of July last year. Stephen Hawking has put forward a new theory that changes the way scientists view black holes, saying he was wrong about them in the past.

The physicist told a conference on gravitation in Dublin that he has revised his belief that black holes destroy everything that falls on them. He spoke to a packed lecture hall at the 17th International Conference of General Relativity and Gravitation, giving his new views in the presentation entitled The Information Paradox for Black Holes.

I'm nearly finished. I hope that oxygen's pumping around. For years, the physicist argued that the extreme gravitational fields of black holes somehow overturned the quantum laws.

Now he has dropped this idea. I'm just picking out little paragraphs. And here's a quote from him. He said, the black hole only appears to form, but later opens up and releases information about what fell in, so we can be sure of the past.

And he says we can predict the future. So that's Stephen Hawking. And many scientists, though, well, they conclude that the creation is just so complex and integrated that outside intelligence must have been involved at the outset.

[22 : 06] So science tentatively creeps along thin eyes, probing how, but purpose is another matter entirely. And a few weeks ago, we had John Blanchard with us here for a presentation.

And it was the interface between science and the biblical revelation. And we have at least one CD, anyway, from that evening when John Blanchard came along.

And they're available afterwards. Friends, from the first page of the Bible, the presentation of God, it unashamedly declares that God is the creator and sustainer of this creation.

And that means, listen, here's the point. One way or another, he owns you. And we live on his turf.

And so if we try to tipex him out, it's ultimately futile.

Death opens the jaws and we meet our creator. Just today, here in this church, we had a funeral for a 19-year-old lad. We all know that life's fragile.

[23 : 14] And so, friends, we need a saviour because we, all of us here, we live as if God isn't a creator. And the angel announces good news.

Good news, he's here. And once we comprehend God to be the creator of all things outside of himself, and listen, heavenly angelic messengers, they're suddenly part and parcel of the creation, do you see?

Nothing strange about that. God is the creator and so we need a saviour. God is the creator and so angelic beings, they're suddenly part and parcel of the glorious creation, the wonderful array of life that is created.

You know, think about this. If you'd never seen a horse before, just imagine that, you'd never seen a horse in your whole life.

Well, if someone was relaying an account to you over coffee at work about a horse, well, just imagine your incredulity and your scepticism as your work colleague explains this strange beast that they've come across.

[24 : 27] She says over coffee, and do you know what? I could hear it coming down West George Street, clanking its feet. It was terrifying. I could see it amidst the traffic.

It was really tall and perched right on the top, sitting there, was a policeman. And this beast, it was coming along. And the animal, it was clanking. It had iron shoes.

Can you imagine that? You'd imagine your colleague was drunk, couldn't you? But they're trying to convince you, am I right, of the truth. So the angels announce the birth of a saviour to the shepherds, and the Bible is declaring it to us here in Glasgow.

Our next carol is still the night, and wouldn't it be good if we could all together sort of travel back to Bethlehem, 2,000 miles, 2,000 years, and we could sort of assemble outside of that manger.

Maybe Ruth could be conducting us, and we could sing outside into the evening sky. So we'll sing after the introduction, still the night. till the night, holy and high, see the world heard from sky May the goods have been set those esté, Only on joy the churches we love An end and fear.

[26 : 24] Sweet heavenly heaven, Sleep in heavenly heaven Till the night, glory the night Shepherds fell, soul alive Every time is near and long Far and near the angels come Christ the leader is here Christ the leader is here

Still the night, glory the night Son of God, Lord of Christ Thou in dying from thy way Thine provide the hour of praise Save us now as long Save us now as long Save us now as long Well I wonder if

I'm explaining Luke's account properly to you.

You know I hope it seems reasonable. That's Luke's purpose in writing. You might be familiar with Luke's purpose. He writes to somebody called Theophilus. I'll just read the first four verses of Luke's Gospel In so much as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us Just as those who were from the beginning The beginning eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us It seemed good to me also having followed all things closely for some time past to write an orderly account for you most excellent Theophilus That you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught And the shepherds aren't gullible are they?

They go to Bethlehem don't they? To explore the angels' announcement We'll see that in verse 15 When the angels went away from them into heaven The shepherds said to one another Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened Which the Lord has made known to us And as we finish there's a question sort of left hanging in the air And it's have you explored Jesus? That's the question I was meditating on this passage this afternoon And I noticed how God moves in And he doesn't allow the shepherds to say Well that was an interesting phenomenon A fascinating sort of take on life A philosophy in the making No Verse 10 All people The angels say The angels said to them Fear not for behold I bring you good news News of great joy that will be for all people For unto you Unto you Is born this day In the city of David A saviour Who is Christ The Lord And so do you see All people It's to the The message is to the total creation You could even put your name in there You could say Onto And put your name in there I could say onto Alex This message is All people The whole of the creation

[30 : 49] And friends The creator listen Has what? He's joined his creation He's closing in As a saviour He's coming This message is to all people Unto you And the question is Will you let him?

Will you check him out Like these shepherds? And if you want to Do that in the In the new year It would be good to start the new year Checking out Jesus Christ And the gospel message We have a course called Christianity Explored And there's cards In front of you On the pews I think About that course Do take those home with you You might even have a friend That you'd like to bring with you Now for those already In the family of God Well you're in verse 20 friends And as I read I want you to To pull alongside verse 20 Bring it alongside your life just now And if it's not in harmony You need to do business with God Just listen to verse 20 And the shepherds returned Glorifying and praising God For all they had heard and seen As it had been told them And the question is Is that your lie?

Think about this It's only sin That keeps you From a verse 20 Sort of a lie A glorifying and praising God Sort of lie And this Jesus For each of us here This evening He's how we can all step in To verse 20 And live a life on his creation That glorifies God Here it is then I hope you agree It's good news Of great joy And our final carol Beckons us to Bethlehem With the shepherds O come All ye faithful O come All ye faithful Joyful and triumphs O come Of all ye faithful O come O come To me Joyful and triumphs

O come O come Of all ye faithful To all ye faithful The End The End

The End The End The End

[35 : 11] The End The End The End The End The End The End The End The End The End The End The End The End The End The End The End The End Now in pleasure, dearie.

O come and honor, dearie. O come and honor, dearie.

O come and honor, dearie. Thank you. Thank you once again for coming.

And tea and coffee will be now served. I can just imagine the trolleys there. They'll be coming out of that door like greyhounds out of Trap One in a minute. So do stay if you can.

There's a desk as you leave in the vestibule area with some CDs on, an excellent selection of CDs. It might be that you want to give one of those away as a Christmas present.

[36 : 43] There's also a table here with the CDs on. And there's plenty of these little booklets here. What's the point of Christmas? They're a really high quality booklet and they're free if you want to explore Christianity.

Just take one with you. And I'll close in prayer. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. Dear Heavenly Father, we just thank you for this amazing message.

We thank you that you came amidst your creation to save your creation, to draw a people to yourself. And we pray, Father, that that message would be dwelling with us through your Spirit, that we wouldn't set it aside, that we'd be drawn and attracted to you and live lives that glorify you and radiate you here on this, your creation.

So we pray that you'd go with us now. You'd give us a great Christmas with our family. We pray for the journeys that we have to make. We pray that they'd be taken in safety.

[37 : 51] And we pray for all the relationships that are going on, that you'd give us words that are appropriate this Christmas. And so we lift all these things to you. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of his Spirit be with us now, this Christmas and forevermore.

Amen. Amen.