

Carols After Work (whole service)

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Preacher: Alex Bedford

[0 : 00] Well, good evening friends and a warm welcome to Carol's After Work by Candlelight. It's good to see you. Well, at least I can see some of you anyway in the darkness.

Without doubt, think about this, we've all come from different situations, haven't we? I guess some of you, you've had a hectic day at work. Maybe your mind's still buzzing with all the things that have been going on.

Or perhaps for you it's like the half-time whistle. You've been busy shopping on Buchanan Street and you've just come in for a break.

Or maybe, like me, you're helping to facilitate this evening's carol service. We're all here, aren't we? We've sort of taken time out together in the midst of our busy lives.

Time to reflect and time to remember that Jesus visited our planet. And so we'll begin by asking him to come to us through his spirit.

[1 : 04] As we later will be lifting his word from the scripture. So we'll begin by prayer and we'll be asking that Jesus would come to meet us here in 2006. So shall we pray?

Dear Heavenly Father, we pray that you would presence yourself with us this evening. That Father, we'd encounter your Son.

Our prayer is that you would help us to set aside all the things that might be milling around in our minds just now. Yes, Father, help us to engage with you through our assembly together as a church, through your word and by the overshadowing of your spirit.

And we ask in Christ's name. Amen. Our first carol, it takes us back to the moment when God declared the birth of his Son.

Not on television news, not on CNN or something like that. Not even to the Roman Emperor. Not to the movers and shakers of this world as we might expect.

[2 : 16] But to people like you and me. People going about the day-to-day tasks. You know, to the shepherds. Well, it just seemed like another day at the office for them.

And then God came to speak to them. While shepherds watched their flocks by night. And we stand to sing after the introduction. Thank you.

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The End The End The End The Lord of the Lord is the Son of the Lord, the Lord is the Son of the Lord.

[5 : 18] Before we begin by looking at a passage about Jesus' birth from the Bible, I'd like us to first of all sort of think about how we're wired up.

How as human beings we're future orientated. The New Testament, it ends with a book of what? A book of Revelation.

John gives us a privileged vision into what is to come. And so yes, we peer into the book of Revelation and we see that those of us who trust Jesus will be with him for all of eternity in his presence and we'll be together living with him in a new creation.

You know, we yearn for better things, don't we? Am I right? You and me. I've just come down from our church offices on 25 Bath Street and our minister, Willie Philip, he had an enormous clock.

I think it was over three foot in diameter. And he told me what he was doing with it. You see, at the Cornhill training course there's a little bit of a problem with students coming late into lectures.

[6 : 31] So he was putting it up in their room so that they can see it when they're having refreshments together. And we all want improvement with things, don't we? You know, perhaps at

work you've been looking ahead to 2007.

Maybe looking back at this year thinking how things could have run more smoothly. What went wrong? How to change things to make the business more efficient. We're like systems in place, don't we?

Accountability. Satisfied customers. Healed patients. We want, don't we? Think about it. A better future. The faults ironed out. Sometimes when I'm in a car, in a passenger seat this is a warning, incidentally.

I'm sometimes in the passenger seat of a car and I've been known to say to a driver the acceleration lane is for accelerating. Put your foot down. Or the wife.

I once said to her you're too close to the wheel. Move your seat back. We want improvements, don't we, like this? We want, well, we envisage a better future. Am I right?

[7 : 39] With things running smoothly. Think about plotting this on a graph and extending it. The word extrapolating it. You know, we'll only be fully satisfied in an environment of perfection, won't we?

We'll always see things that can be improved and made better. So do you see how, as human beings, we're all future orientated. Think about this.

It's like our sails are set for a place in our heart that we have some distant acquaintance with like sort of an evocative memory yet we're sort of presently separated.

Yes, we make our plans friends, don't we? Yet sadly, it seems that sort of satisfaction evaporates as we approach it.

There's a distance between satisfaction. It sometimes seems insurmountable. C.S. Lewis writes this. Are you listening? So a duckling wants to swim in such a thing as water.

[8 : 48] A baby wants to suck such a thing as milk. And if I find myself with a longing for which this world cannot meet, then it probably means that I was made for something more than this world.

Yes, friends, we want a day to dawn, don't we? A day to dawn when the yearning of our hearts is greeted by the reality itself like a wedding day and the consummation of a romance.

And friends, the Bible says that there is such a day, there is such a place. And the Bible says that this is why Jesus came to planet Earth.

He came to invite us in to a new creation. We sing about him now in our second carol. O come, Emmanuel. As well. O come, Emmanuel.

O God, Emmanuel, and let him have been in the hell.

[10 : 11] I want him to be ever made, until the dawn of dawn appear.

We do it, we do it, we do it, we do it. We do it, we do it, we do it.

To the dawn of dawn, the dawn of dawn, through the light of dawn, through the dawn of dawn, through the light of dawn.

Through the dawn of dawn, through the dawn of dawn, through the dawn of dawn, he will give the dawn of dawn, through the dawn of dawn, through the dawn of dawn, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord, let me be Thy love from heaven's glory From heaven's heart I leave away And give them victory over the day Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel Welcome to the earth, O Lord, let me

O Lord, O Lord, let me be I'm still in my life and fear Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel Let's not stand up for us to come Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel In the hand you have held the kingdom In the land you have held the kingdom In the hand you have held the kingdom In the hand you have held the kingdom Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel In the hand you have held the kingdom

[12 : 58] In the hand you have held the kingdom In the hand you have held the kingdom Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel Give them hand you will In the hand you have held the kingdom Please sit down.

So we've thought about how often we're sort of frustrated by our present experience. We seek a better future. And amazingly, listen, the Bible brings it to us.

Yes, it does. God visits planet Earth to bring that future in. Yes, a new creation with none of the frustrations that we have to live with just now.

For example, in the new creation there'll be no tears, there'll be no death, no broken relationships. And this is why the first Christmas day is so massively important.

So let's go back over 2,000 years. Have you ever used Google Earth? You can zoom in, can't you, on a location. Let's do something like that and home in on the target.

[14 : 22] Come with me. Imagine in your mind's eye that we're going back to the first century. There was Romans strutting the streets. Wasn't there in the first century?

They were the world's superpower. Of course, back then, the Old Testament part of the Bible had spoken about a coming king in the line of David.

We've been singing about him. To be born in Bethlehem. To have an eternal kingdom. Did you get that? An eternal kingdom to Samuel chapter 7.

And he was going to come to save humankind from their sin. But it all seemed quiet on the Western Front. Indeed, it had been quiet for over 400 years.

It was as if, listen, it was as if, the fuse had fizzled out or something. Like the fuse had become damp and it had all fizzled out. And then one day, suddenly, like a blinding flash, we'll let Luke bring it to us.

[15 : 32] Just listen to this from Luke's Gospel. Luke chapter 1, reading from verse 26. In the sixth month, that is, in the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elizabeth, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David.

And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at this saying, I should think I would be.

And tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David. You see it all coming together.

And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary said to the angel, Well, how will this be since I am a virgin?

[16 : 50] And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God.

And behold, your relative, Elizabeth, in her old age, has also conceived a son. And this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.

And the angel departed from her. You know, in effect, the angel Gabriel is saying to Mary, Here's the integration point.

Those promises in 2 Samuel chapter 7 from your Old Testament, the one Isaiah spoke of, the one who the Psalms point to, You will give birth to him.

[17 : 50] Verse 31. The angel is effectively saying, Mary, you're going to bear the child of all of the Old Testament. Well, this was a weighty responsibility, wasn't it?

For a young mum, the fiancé of a shepherd, would be a big responsibility, wouldn't it? To bring the Messiah into the world. She says, Only one thing you might have looked at, Gabriel.

There's just one thing. You might have overlooked it. And that's verse 34. She says, How can this be? Since I am a virgin. It's like the trains come up against the stoppers, isn't it?

Against the buffers at Central Station. A small matter of biology, Mary's saying. So think about this. Mary's logic, just run this through in your mind.

Mary's logic is demanding more revelation. Do you see? She isn't rejecting what her ears are taking in. No, but she needs more information to better comprehend this amazing message.

[18 : 59] And when we're exploring the things of God, friends, you and me, when we're exploring the things of God, we naturally have plenty of questions. I can't see the bubbles above your heads, the questions you might have just now, but we all have questions when we come to God's word.

And that's a natural thing. We'll leave Mary in her dilemma just now, for the time being, while we sing our next carol, Joy to the World.

And we stand to sing after the introduction. of John Joy to the World. Oh, Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[21 : 22] Thank you.

Thank you.

Reason number one, verse 35, the Holy Spirit will come upon you, which he does this day incidentally. Reason number two, verse 36, Gabriel says, remember, do you remember Elizabeth? Can you remember Elizabeth, says Gabriel, your relative, the one who everybody thought was too old to bear a child? Well, she's in her sixth month now, says the angel Gabriel to Mary. And the Bible, friends, it always points to historic fact, God's track record, the reality of it.

And then reason number three, verse 37, the conclusion of the matter. And Mary, I guess she beamed from cheek to cheek when she heard that. It's all true. It's coherent.

[23 : 23] Yeah, she'd had a logical questions, hadn't she, about biology. And Gabriel said to her, you need to factor in he who controls all things.

It was an answer, for nothing will be impossible with God, said Gabriel to Mary. The word is omnipotence, isn't it? You know, our 21st century world, it often seems to be in chaos, doesn't it? If you look at the television news, you read the evening times in Glasgow, it often seems to be in chaos. Yet the Bible says, here is he who has control. Here is purpose. Here is power. Here is love. And so for people like you and me, friend, there is hope, isn't there? Because with God, we commune, we relate with the ultimate power. Do you see?

Our next carol is still the night. Choo.

[24 : 50] Choo potent. Choo potent.

Choo dernier! Choo potent. Say, O King, for your life be covered and free.

Sing in heaven, be in heaven. Sing in heaven, be in heaven.

Fill the night, holy the night. Shepherds heard, song the light.

Every pounding, clear and long. Call and hear the angels home.

[26 : 20] Christ the Redeemer is here. Christ the Redeemer is here.

Fill the night, holy the night.

Fill the night, holy the night. All the night, holy the night.

All the day. Fill the night, holy the night.

Save us, Lord. Save us, Lord. Save us, Lord.

[27 : 24] Let's sit down. Well done. Have you been practising?

It's lovely to hear from here, listen to you singing that carol. So we began, didn't we? We began by thinking about how we humans are future orientated.

We naturally plan ahead and we look into and we envisage a better future. Friends, think about this. Without Jesus, without Jesus, all our plans, all our hopes, well they fizzle out, don't they, in death. By contrast, with him, we smile with Mary. Yes, we do. We smile with Mary. Our lives suddenly harmonise with the grand unifying purposes of God.

That eternal kingdom that we were thinking about. Verse 33, his kingdom will never end. Tozer writes about the enigma of the Christian life.

[28 : 33] Listen to this. He says, he is born on earth and yet a citizen of another country he has never visited. Now what is our response to this material this evening?

If we're already in God's family, we need to be asking questions like this. Are our lives consistent with this revelation? You know, is our eternal king and our eternal destiny driving our lives?

Do you see the question? We pray, don't we, Christians? We pray, thy will be done on earth as in heaven. It's a prayer of unifying, unification, of integration, we pray.

But think about this, friends, the decisions that you're running through. Maybe the decisions you've made in recent times. We need to be thinking, are we living our lives? Are we planning consistently with this great revelation that God gives to us?

It's so easy, isn't it, for our lives to be controlled by horizontal priorities. So Mary had a dilemma, didn't she? But in the end, she said, verse 38, I am the Lord's servant.

[29 : 52] And is that you, friend, in these times? Could that be said about you? And if you've not yet entered into the family of God, you could say, well, it was interesting tonight.

It was enjoyable. We sang some carols. But I'll keep my head down for the time being. I'll just carry on with life, paying the bills, guessing the future as best I can, hoping that my health will sort of hold out.

And yes, there is that option. But it means that you've chosen the things of this world, the priorities, listen, that have borne the world in which we live.

Do you see? Mary hesitated, yet she sought more revelation, didn't she? She explored the phenomenon. And a carpenter's fiancé named Mary, well, she found her place, didn't she, in the

unfolding purposes of God.

So, friends, why not seize the moment and make 2007, that is next year, 2007, the year that you seriously explore Christianity.

[31 : 08] You see, we have a course running from the 1st of February. It's called Christianity Explored. And it runs up the road in our church halls, 25 Bath Street.

Starts on Thursday, the 1st of February, at 7pm, with a meal. It's a great course. It's for folk exploring the Christian faith for the first time, or otherwise Christians who want to go through the basics of Christianity again.

It's actually nine sessions altogether. So it goes on for nine weeks each Thursday evening. And you're welcome to come along to that. Why not seize the moment? I'll be standing outside at the door with these booklets here.

And they tell you a little bit about the Christianity Explored course. And there's contact details inside the booklet. And we'd just like to know numbers for catering purposes.

So why not seize the moment? Our final carol. Well, it beckons us. It beckons us from Buchanan Street here to Bethlehem with the shepherds.

[32 : 15] So come, all ye faithful, and we'll stand to sing after the introduction. Let's pray. Thank you.

Ziggo, and I am laughing! Thank you and thank you.

Thank you and thank you.

Thank you and thank you.

Thank you and thank you. Thank you and thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[34 : 21] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. evening. Do stay if you're able for tea and coffee that will be brought out shortly. There's also a bookstall over there with books from £2. They make great stocking fillers. People seem to have nearly everything these days and with a book from that bookstall you can give a present with eternal implications from £2.

The CDs there from £3. They're also good stocking fillers. So thanks for coming along. Shall we close with a prayer as we stand? Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending your Son into this world all those years ago.

We thank you that through him we can look forward to eternal life with you, where all frustrations will be resolved, where there's no more suffering, there's no more crying, there's no more death, where all the problems that we might have just now in our lives, those things will all be resolved Father and will dwell with you for all of eternity if we're trusting in your Son Jesus Christ. So we thank you for that revelation and we pray that you'd meet us with your Spirit and make that real to us. Help us to apply it to our lives.

[36 : 11] And Father, as we think ahead to Christmas, we pray that you'd help us as we have time with our relatives, help us to love them, to give them time, to care for them. Help us to visit those folk who we may not get time to visit most of the year.

We pray, Father, for those of us who are travelling. We pray for travelling mercies, that you'd be with us, you'd take care of us and give us comfortable and safe journeys.

So we lift these things to you in Christ's name. Amen. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now this day and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Please, please sit there. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.