

Christmas Sunday Service - Whole

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Date: 20 December 2015

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 0 0] Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Not like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by hand to bring them out of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, although I was their husband.

For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel in those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. And so it came to pass.

As Matthew tells us in the beginning of his gospel, Behold, an angel appeared to Joseph, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

[1 : 1 3] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

And so the promised time arrived, the time of God's appointing, the time when one is born who bears the Lord's anointing. We sing our first hymn on the screens.

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We sing our first hymn on the screens. We sing our first hymn on the screens.

Let's pray.

[3 : 0 9] Let's pray.

Let's pray.

Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Help us, Lord, we pray, to understand the joy of the Christmas message, to understand it afresh today, so that we might know you, O God, our Father, through Jesus Christ, your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.

[5 : 3 7] Let me welcome you all very warmly to our fellowship this morning, especially if you're visiting with us. We hope you'll feel at home and very much part of our church family here.

We don't have notice sheets out today, but we meet this evening, not for our usual service at 6.30, but we gather here from 4.30 onwards so that we can go out in groups, three large groups, we hope, into the city center to sing carols and then join together, as we always do on the concert hall steps to sing for those going by and then to come back here for mulled wine and tea and coffee and mince pies and so on afterwards.

So do come and join us from 4.30 onwards. You may think the weather's a little iffy, but the BBC weather forecast says from 5 o'clock it's going to be dry. So if that promise time arrives, we shall be rejoicing.

I can't say I quite have the same confidence as I do with the prophet Jeremiah, but there we are. We'll hope for the best. Christmas week is upon us. On Wednesday, we meet for our lunchtime carol service a little earlier than the normal 1.15.

We'll be singing carols from 1 o'clock, so do come along if you're able. Then on Thursday, of course, at Christmas Eve, we have our candlelit service from 5 to 6 in the evening and then, of course, Christmas Day at 11 in the morning.

[6 : 59] And then next Sunday, we meet as usual on Sunday morning at 11, but we have no evening service next Sunday evening. So our young ones are in with us this morning.

There is a crash and there will be Sunday school for the eights and unders and the little ones can go out a little later on when we're taking up our offering. But we want to sing lots of hymns this morning, so we're going to sing our next one now, which I hope will appear on the screens. When God from heaven to earth came down on Christmas Day. Let's tiens off Oh, go to heaven to earth and kneel Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[9 : 11] Nathan Alexander is going to read to us from this part in the beginning of Luke's Gospel, chapter 1. Amen.

Thank you.

He has shown us joy to all the world. For us, God sends his only Son. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah. Thank you.

Hallelujah. Alleluia Alleluia Alleluia Alleluia Alleluia Alleluia Alleluia Now we sing Jesus Our Son Alleluia Alleluia Alleluia Alleluia Alleluia Alleluia Alleluia Well in our Christmas services this year we're asking the question, why was Jesus born?

[12 : 54] And we're seeking the answer from those closest to the events and those who are given by Jesus himself the inside track, if you like, the definitive interpretation of the great events of his life, what it was all about.

That is the inspired writers of the Bible, of course. And that's where we find, not speculation, but God's own authorized interpretation of what the story of Christmas is actually all about.

Not my idea, not your idea, not the idea of your school teacher, who in fact may be very ignorant about all of this, although they may be able to teach you many other useful things. No, today's message is summed up really in that one verse that we read earlier on from Matthew chapter 1, that Jesus came to save his people from their sins.

And you'll see it, I hope, I hope, I hope, on the screen there. You see, we saw that Zechariah's testimony at the beginning of Luke's gospel was this, that at last, salvation long promised by God will be made known to his people.

How? In the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus Christ came into this world to save us from sin's dreadful penalty.

[14 : 18] And you see how this is announced right at the beginning in chapter 1 of these gospel books. Because it tells us that Jesus came into the world to deal with the greatest, the direst need of all human beings.

And the problem, of course, is that people don't always know what their greatest need in life really is. That was true in Jesus' day.

In their day, they were looking for a savior, the Messiah, that's right, they were longing for him. But many of them thought that their greatest need was to be liberated from the Romans. From political oppression.

From economic exploitation and so on. Of course, lots of people today still think that these are the greatest needs in the world.

Many people think that that's what Christmas is about. It's about a message of goodwill and seasonal cheer and charity events and Christmas cards and all sorts of things where, with a touch of sentimentality, we want to make the world a bit of a better place.

[15 : 25] But no, that is not at all what the angel of God wanted to speak about to Joseph at that first Christmas. Now his message was that none of these things at all are the real problem.

Not oppressive Romans. Not dictators. Not terrorists or ISIS. Not climate change. Not poverty.

None of these things. None of these things.

The really big problem in this human world of ours is something different. It's a problem God says you have with me and a problem I have with you.

because this is my world, says God. And what in my eyes really matters is your sin, your guilt, and your rebellion against me and my rule in this world.

That's what you need saving from, the penalty of your sins. Now, Israelites, of all people, ought to have understood that.

[16:30] They had God's law telling them everything that God required. And, of course, pointing out to them how far short they constantly fell from what God required. And so Israelites ought to understand sin better than anybody else on the earth.

Just read the Old Testament. Read the book of Leviticus alone, for example. It's all about endless sacrifices again and again and again, all year, every year, just so that the people could go on living in the presence of God and not be judged immediately for their guilt and sin.

Endless, repeated sacrifices to stave off God's just judgment. Of course, those sacrifices were a great blessing, weren't they? Because they knew that if they trusted God, then God would count it as if the blood of these bulls and goats were their blood.

And he would look on these as if their sins were being borne away by these sacrifices. But, of course, at the same time, it was obvious to everybody that the blood of bulls and goats couldn't really deal with their sins.

Now, of course, it just reminded them of their constant sin. And it drove them again and again to trust God's promises that one day, one day at last, somehow he would do what he had promised.

[17:52] Deal with their sins completely and thoroughly and forever. As he had said he would right from the beginning. And all down the ages, God's promises to do that never faded away.

In fact, they got stronger and stronger and clearer as time went on. And the prophets spoke more and more of a day when at last God would make a new covenant, as we read.

A covenant never to be broken when he would forgive them once and for all the guilt of their sin. We read that in Jeremiah. Or remember the prophet Isaiah who promised that a son of David would come at last to rule forever on the throne.

He would be a promised servant who would somehow bear away the sins of his people and so count many righteous.

Because he would be bruised for their iniquities. He would be wounded for their transgressions. And so he would sprinkle them clean and sprinkle many nations, said the prophet, cleansing them and saving them from their sins forever.

[19:03] And now at last, in the coming of Jesus, the promised time had arrived. At last the one who would bring this promised forgiveness came as the promised savior.

You will call his name Jesus, Yeshua, it means salvation. Because he will save his people from their sins. And we're told all this is to fulfill what was spoken by the prophets.

He will be called Emmanuel, God with us, to save us from our sins. The birth of Jesus Christ is all about a promised forgiveness.

That now at last is coming to pass according to promise in Jesus Christ. Well, we're going to break and sing again as we take up our offering.

And as the little ones go off to their classes. Hark the glad sound. The savior comes. The savior promised long. We'll stay seated for the first couple of verses as the offering comes around.

[20:08] And then we'll stand and sing the last verse together. There. There. There. There. A massive mercy. There. There. There. There. There. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[23:19] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Do keep your Bibles open at Hebrews 9 there.

Because what that reading from Hebrews 9 tells us is not only that Christmas is a promised forgiveness from God our Savior, but that it's about a forgiveness made perfect in Jesus Christ our Savior.

Christmas is about a perfect forgiveness. And the Apostle is looking back at the events that the Christmas story began. And again, he's explaining it to us with full apostolic authority.

And he tells us that through the birth and the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, he has achieved forever a perfect forgiveness for his people.

[24:48] The whole message of that letter to the Hebrews is that in Jesus Christ we have God's finished work forever. One of the great words of the letter.

It is perfected. It is perfected. It is perfect. And it is perfect. That means nothing else is needed for our full forgiveness. Nothing for God to do.

Nothing for us to do, but to receive what Christ has done. And that's wonderfully crystallized in this passage that Rachel read for us that speaks, if you look at it, of three appearances of Christ for us. First of all, look at verses 25 to 28, especially verse 26. It should be on the screens there. Christ's work has secured a perfect forgiveness because first it has secured the past.

Jesus is not like the Old Testament priests who appeared in the temple year after year to put away our sins by the sacrifice of the bar of bulls and goats again and again.

[25 : 59] Look at the screens. He has appeared once and for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Verse 28, Jesus has been offered once to bear the sins of many.

That means it's done. God has achieved in Jesus a work of lasting permanent forgiveness.

And so the next chapter of Hebrews 10 goes on to say that by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And where there's forgiveness of sins, there's no longer any offering for sin.

You see, all of these sacrifices of the Old Testament, they pointed forward to this reality. And now in Jesus, it's fulfilled. It's finished. It's perfect. And the Hebrews writer quotes several times the words from Jeremiah the prophet that we read at the beginning.

Because it's a perfect forgiveness, he says, I will remember your sins and your lawless deeds no more. It's a perfect forgiveness.

[27 : 14] The past is secured forever. And that means that there's nothing more that needs to be done. Nothing needs to be added for you to know perfect forgiveness of your sins by God.

In fact, to think that you could somehow contribute something to that is actually to insult God terribly. Because there is nothing that we could contribute to such a great forgiveness.

In fact, the Hebrews writer says in chapter 10 that if we think we can do that, we're trampling Jesus underfoot. We're treating as profane the blood of the covenant that saves us.

We're insulting the spirit of grace. People find that so hard, don't they? Because it's hard to grasp that forgiveness comes to us as something that's already perfect.

That something is coming to us just as a sheer gift of God's grace. That there's nothing that we have to do because we want to do something. We want to add something. Sometimes we think, well, we need to add something like penance or confessions or some kind of noble works or something like that.

[28 : 28] That's why Roman Catholicism as a religion is so attractive because it gives you the chance to do something, to add something, to do your part, to have all these religious practices.

But it's wrong. You see, if we think that we can add something to what God has done for our forgiveness, it just shows that we really haven't begun to grasp how great the problem of sin actually is and how enormous and how infinite is the work required to forgive that sin.

Sometimes people say, well, it's because I feel so guilty. I want to do something. I want to do something to atone, to make up. The truth is, actually, we don't feel nearly guilty enough.

If we really understood the weight of sin, we would know that we could do absolutely nothing to move that vast, crushing, damning weight of God's anger and God's just penalty against us.

But look what it says there. Jesus appeared once for all to put away sin by his perfect and sufficient sacrifice of himself.

[29 : 46] He's put it all away once and for all as far as the east is from the west. And the Bible says, because of that, God remembers our sin no more.

It's a perfect forgiveness. Our past, however guilty it is, however shameful it is, it's secured once for all because of what Jesus came to do.

And that means that, as Zechariah sang, you can be at peace. It means nothing can haunt you from the past. Nothing. No failure in your life. No lack.

No great evil that you've committed. It's the knowledge of that forgiveness and that it's totally accomplished that can lead your feet into the path of peace, as old Zechariah sang.

You can do nothing to make up for your past sin, but you don't have to because Jesus' forgiveness has dealt with your past. And he's dealt with it forever, once and for all.

[30 : 53] But that's not all. If you look at verse 28, you'll see again, Jesus' forgiveness has secured the future. He will appear a second time, we're told, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Jesus' once for all past, the work that he has done in history forever, secures also our future. And the Christmas message, therefore, guarantees everything that is still to come for this world and for our lives. When he returns, he will usher in the fullness of his salvation to save, ultimately and forever, those who are waiting for him.

See what that means? It means that if you know Jesus Christ, whatever your fears are for the future, you needn't fear. You needn't fear anything for your future life, nothing at all.

Not for your daily needs, not for your job, for your family, your pension, for where you'll live when you're old, for your body, how you'll cope when you're old and decaying.

[32 : 07] You needn't even fear for your physical death or for the judgment that lies beyond death. Because Jesus' death for sins has secured the future forever.

There's no guilt in life and there's no fear in death for those who know Jesus, the Savior, who has perfectly forgiven our sins.

Because we have a great high priest who's gone through the heavens to lead the way for us. And he's coming back to lead us there, to lead us safely home. It's a natural thing, of course, isn't it? Especially when we get older. It's a natural thing to fear for the future. We fear aging. And we fear death. Death is a real enemy. It stalks every single one of us.

And at Christmas time, that's very especially true, isn't it? At Christmas time, perhaps above any other time, we're so conscious, aren't we, of loved ones who are no longer alive. We're so conscious, aren't we, of loved ones who are no longer alive.

[33 : 12] And the grief's very fresh and real, isn't it? And we can think about ourselves and think, well, how will I cope? How will I cope when I get older and weaker and frailer?

Well, you see, the gospel says, well, don't look inside to yourself about how you'll cope. It says, look back. Look back to the once and for all appearance of Jesus to deal with sin, to deal with its dreadful penalty.

Not merely physical death, but everlasting death. He's done it. And it says, look forward to his certain appearing again and rejoice that the perfect forgiveness that you have in Jesus Christ means that you can face that future with a steady eye because you know the future is secure in Jesus Christ.

And you know that not even your own sin and your own folly and your own stupid, stupid mistakes can undermine the perfect work of Jesus Christ, your Savior, for your salvation forever.

Forever. Forever. That's a reassurance, isn't it? When you're often foolish and sinful and when you do stumble so badly, constantly.

[34 : 36] But Jesus' perfect forgiveness secures the past and guarantees the future. And actually, there's even more still.

If you look at Hebrews 9 and verse 24, Jesus' forgiveness secures, he says, every single moment of our present life and existence.

It's not that this is all just some sort of remote thing in the past and something that we sort of long for as being far away in the future. And we're in limbo in the middle with nothing at the moment.

Look at that verse 24. He is appearing for us now in the presence of God on our behalf. And that means that Jesus' forgiveness is at work now, today, every day, every hour for those who belong to him.

He is today a merciful high priest. Just like us in every way and yet without sin. And therefore, knowing our human flesh, he is able to intercede for us in our weakness.

[35 : 43] And he does so constantly, all the time. Maybe you're feeling rather weakened and needy today.

Well, Hebrews 7 verse 25 says, He is able to save those to the uttermost who draw near to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

Always. Not that Jesus has to do anything more today on behalf of us before God. Jesus interceding doesn't mean that.

It's that his perfect finished work, his blood continues to speak peace for us day after day after day. And so that that ongoing power guarantees that we have intimate fellowship with God himself and access to God himself in a never-ending constant way.

Nothing can undo his perfect work of forgiveness for us. And therefore, nothing, nothing can prevent us from drawing near to our Heavenly Father in perfect peace, with our conscience cleansed, as pure as the driven snow.

[37 : 03] Even though this very day we know that we have done things that ought to separate us from God. He ever lives. And he appears now in the presence of God on our behalf to bring us to God.

So nothing can stop us coming near to him. Christ's finished work secures our present as well as the past and the future.

And that means we know that we can be at peace with God no matter what. And our path can be the path of peace today and every single day because of what Jesus did.

And so we don't need any priests today. We don't need any mediators to bring us to God. We don't have to pray through the saints or anything nonsense like that. We don't need some special worship leader in church to sing special songs to draw us into God's presence.

We don't need any special rituals or any confessions or anything like that. No, Jesus' forgiveness is perfect forgiveness. Yesterday, today and forever.

[38 : 11] It's the same. And it belongs to us. If he is indeed our Lord and Savior. That's what the message of Christmas is all about.

And no sin and no failure today can ever separate us from our Heavenly Father. Or tomorrow. Or the next day. Or the day after that.

Or ever. Because he's appearing now on our behalf. And therefore he's proclaiming a perfect forgiveness for our sins.

And so, as we sometimes sing, that means when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, which is real. I look to heaven. And I see him there who made an end of all my sin. Because Jesus came as a Savior from sin's dreadful penalty. He was born as the promised Savior. And he is risen. He's interceding today with a perfect salvation.

[39 : 14] And thus rejoicing, free from sorrow. Praise his voice and greet the morrow. Christ the babe was born for you. And for everyone who trusts in his name.

And who calls him Savior. Well, before we think of one last thing, we're going to sing again. From the squalor of a borrowed stable.

A hymn that speaks of how Christ went through the stable. To the cruel cross. And now is at the place of highest honor on the throne. Interceding for his own beloved.

Till his father calls to bring them home. best meri about his relative to all the world.

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

[40 : 15] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Just before we conclude this morning, I want to pick up on something that's very, very important and that many of the Christmas carols speak of and allude to.

Christ the babe was born for you. because, see, the message of Christmas is not just one of promised forgiveness by God the Savior and perfect forgiveness made complete in Jesus Christ and his saving work because the truth is that all of that would actually remain meaningless for you and me unless we see the implication of it all, unless it comes home to us, and as it becomes real that we realize that this is a forgiveness that is promised and made perfect and must become personal and can become personal and does become personal even for those who are the very worst of sinners, the chiefest of sinners, the foremost of sinners.

[44 : 02] Listen to some words written by the Apostle Paul as he speaks very personally about what coming to understand the message of Christmas truly meant for him.

He's writing to Timothy and he says this, He says, He came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost.

But I receive mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost sinner, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

You see how personal all that really is for the Apostle Paul. Jesus didn't just come into this world in the past in some kind of abstract way to deal with sins as though sin was some sort of oil slick floating around in the world that needed to be dispersed and put away.

He came into the world to save sinners, human beings, people like us, and he came to save us from the personal guilt of our own personal sins against God.

[45 : 46] He came to bring personal forgiveness. And that once for all work in the past to deal with sins forever and to secure the future of peace with God and life everlasting, that is something that

he imparts personally to real people, people like you and me, people in the real world today.

And in the present real experience of men and women and boys and girls, the world over, that is what is happening today. When they hear the message of the good news of Jesus and when they respond with loving trust to the very personal call that he gives in his gospel to them to be their savior, offering himself to us as just that.

And that's what makes Christmas gospel. Good news. Not just interesting news. Not just true news. Not just historic news.

But good news. Personal news. Christmas isn't just like Remembrance Sunday. It's not just looking back at something which happened long ago and respectfully acknowledging it.

Commemorating it. No. Jesus is a savior from sins today. For real people today. And Christmas brings a personal message to those who will receive that good news today.

[47 : 21] Good news, says Paul, even for the foremost of sinners, the chief of sinners, as he calls himself. And he had good reason to call himself that. He was a blasphemer. He was a persecutor of God's people.

He was an insolent opponent. He was ignorant, he says. He was unbelieving. He murdered people who were following Jesus Christ. So great was his hatred. And yet he received mercy and forgiveness of his sins.

Maybe some of you have got friends and loved ones who seem to fit that kind of description that Paul had of himself. Maybe they wouldn't use those words.

But they blaspheme. They hate. They want nothing to do with Christ. They're ignorant. And we tend to think, well, there's no hope for them.

Maybe some of us here this morning even feel, well, actually, that is fairly close to where I am. I might not use Paul's language, but yeah, that fits me, my attitude to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[48 : 26] But look what happened to that vehement, determined, vicious opponent of Jesus Christ. That hater of Jesus.

That scorner of the church and its message. I received mercy, says Paul. The grace of God overflowed to me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Isn't that extraordinary? I think by any account, that extraordinary change that took place in that man, Saul of Tarsus, to become the great apostle Paul is absolutely astonishing.

But that is why Jesus came, not just for Paul, but for anyone, the world over, who receives the good news of Jesus Christ because he came into this world to save sinners, to make forgiveness and peace and reconciliation with God possible and personal, supremely personal.

look at verse 16. He says, it happened to him he received mercy so that as the worst of sinners, God could display in him his unlimited patience as an example for others who likewise would believe in him and receive eternal life.

[49 : 50] What he's saying is that the depth of the grace and mercy of God that can bring forgiveness to this man, violent, blasphemous, murderous, if he can do that, then there is no one on this earth for whom the forgiveness of God in Christ cannot become real and personal and wonderful and utterly life transforming.

not your scornful, disinterested husband or wife or son or daughter or mother or father or friend.

Not your friends at work who want nothing to do with Jesus except to scorn his name and blaspheme in his name. Not anybody here in this building this morning who thinks that because of what they've done, they must be far too far gone for any of this to be possible for them and they could never be at peace with God again.

No, you're wrong. Look, this saying, verse 15, is trustworthy. It deserves full acceptance. You must accept the truth of this. Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, even the foremost sinners.

Jesus Christ was born to save. He calls you one and calls you all to gain his everlasting hall. Christ is born to save. That's what we sing in the Christmas carols.

[51 : 19] To save from sin's dreadful penalty, from the guilt of our sins before a holy and just and perfect God who cannot look upon sin. He came to bring forgiveness, full and free, and the knowledge of salvation that alone can lead our feet, can lead our lives into the path of peace, both in this world and forever and ever.

Long promised this forgiveness. Long promised down the ages by the prophets, but made perfect forever in the work of Jesus Christ, the Savior.

And made personal today, today, right now, for everyone who will receive that forgiveness through trust in the name of Jesus Christ and him alone.

The perfect man, incarnate God, who by selfless sacrifice destroyed our sinful history, all fallen Adam's curse.

in him, the curse to blessing turns, our barren spirit flowers, and o'er the shattered power of sin, the cross of Jesus towers.

[52 : 37] That's the joy, that's the wonder of the Christmas message, of the Christmas miracle, and it is a miracle. That in our Lord Jesus Christ, we have a Savior from sin's dreadful penalty.

And we have a future forever with him in a life that never ends. But friends, this Christmas, don't just listen to the story of Christmas, wonderful as it is.

Grasp hold of the message of Christmas, which is a personal message from God above to you. You will receive him. There is in Jesus Christ forgiveness, past, present, and future.

An end of darkness, the birth of light, and the beginning now of a life that will never end. Because he came into this world to save sinners, even the foremost.

And that must include at least every one of us in this place this morning. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, how we thank you that in the place of our sin we have the light of the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[54 : 04] So help us, we pray, this Christmas amidst all the celebration and all the earthly joy. May our ears and our hearts be opened to the message from heaven of sins forgiven and of life everlasting through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Well, our last song makes known that wonderful mystery made known to us. Oh, what a mystery I see, what marvelous design that God should come as one of us, a son in David's line.

bow to heaven and the earth In the name of Jesus Christ's life, INE?

In the name of Jesus Christ, the reverse inseminn 2010, Thank you.

Thank you.

[56 : 07] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

And so now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of his Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.