

The Meaning of Christmas

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Date: 25 December 2021

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Thank you.

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[12 : 29] Thank you.

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[14 : 59] Thank you.

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[19 : 59] Thank you.

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[24 : 59] Thank you.

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[27 : 59] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Christmas.

Christmas.

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on the cross.

[31 : 04] people. the dead, says Paul. And that's when he was declared to the whole world to be son of God with power. No longer just the apparently weak, ordinary human being, veiled in human flesh, but at last the triumphant conqueror of death itself. An astonishing power unveiled in the resurrection of Jesus that declares his work is achieved, that declares he is the Savior he said he was. And yet isn't it wonderful that God's mighty answer, his definitive answer to this world, this world of sin, it began in the flesh of a tiny little baby in a back street in an insignificant part of the world, the outskirts of the Roman Empire. How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given. And there's a hiddenness, you know, still about the message of the gospel of Jesus

Christ in this world. One day all the earth and all its people will see his glory unveiled unmistakably. We know that, his resurrection makes it certain. His return will make it absolutely clear clear. But until then, you see, to many, it does seem nothing more than just foolishness.

But in fact, this gospel message is the power of God for salvation for all who believe then and still today. Take those who were involved in the Christmas story back then. You see, don't you, that this outwardly insignificant little event that it burst into their lives, didn't it, in the most extraordinary way, astonishing way. They're not standing in the background watching the story like we might watch a nativity play in a school. No, Christmas absolutely burst right into their lives and into their stories.

They had no option but to be involved in it. They were caught up right in the midst. Christmas burst into their story. And when that happened, of course, there were some, many, who met Christ's coming to earth with indifference. Those in the inn in Bethlehem, as we know, they find no room. I suppose they didn't know who it was, did they? I'm sure there was room for some people, the right kind of people. It's just the same today. Many people are just too busy. No time.

Time for everything else at Christmas, but no time for this most important story the world has ever known. Some, of course, met Christ's coming with rank intolerance. Think of Herod, full of hostility.

[34 : 33] Actually, Herod was one of the few who really did know only too well who Jesus was. The thing is, it was because He knew who He was and what it meant for Him. That's why He acted the way He did.

He tried His best to destroy Christ by destroying all the young children, all the young boys in the whole area. And, you know, again, today there are many who do know the truth. They know who Jesus is, and they know the claim that Jesus Christ makes on their lives. They know the revolution that will be put into effect if they recognize Him for who He truly is. And they're not prepared to accept that.

So, just like Herod, they want to silence the Lord Jesus, ignore His claim on them. But, of course, there were others, weren't there, who did have room. There were those who met Christ's coming with invitation, with the shepherds, there were the wise men, there were people like Simeon and Anna and many others we read of through the gospel stories. They perceived, they saw, and they understood the wonderful news of the birth of the Savior. And something happened to them. The Christmas story burst in on their life story. And they became part of it, and it became part of them. Emmanuel. God became part of their lives. He came into their believing hearts. And that's why we

read, they went on their way rejoicing for the wonderful gift that God had given to them. They experienced personally an astonishing power of heaven unveiled in this world. Well, there's a third thing that we need to think about the Christmas gospel. Let's pause again and sing words that all of those who welcomed Christ at His first coming sang so gladly. Come, O long-expected Jesus, born to set your people free. Come, O long-expected Jesus, born to reign.

[36 : 48] Come, O long-expected Jesus, born to reign. Come, O Lord, our King. O God, exalted Jesus, all his holy people free, all of his and saints released us, Christ in whom our rest shall be.

His best friend and God's salvation, God's salvation to the Lord, with his love of every nation, God of every loving heart.

O God, exalted Jesus, all his holy people free, Lord, to bring us forever, have you gracious me, the way.

O God, exalted Jesus, all his holy people free, Lord, exalted Jesus, all his holy people free, Christ in whom our rest shall be.

O God, exalted Jesus, all his holy people free, O God, exalted Jesus, all his holy people free, O God, exalted Jesus, all his holy people free, So the gospel message announced at the first Christmas is about God's ancient promise fulfilled in answer to our world's rebellion.

[38 : 48] And it's about his astonishing power unveiled in achieving reconciliation of enemies back to God. But above all, therefore, Christmas is also about an abiding presence assured.

It's God's universal personal call to belong in the Father's house forever, forever. Listen to how Paul goes on.

We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

Christ did for those of faith who welcomed his coming what he longs to do for all who will welcome him. He came into their lives. He freed them from the darkness, from the hopelessness of sin.

And he made them into children of God himself, part of his family. Now, look around at our world. We live in an age, don't we, of loneliness, of estrangement.

[40 : 05] And how much worse that's been because of all the lockdowns these last couple of years. A sense of not belonging is so pervasive in our society. What could be more desperately needed?

What could be more wonderful than a message that says you can truly belong in the family of God himself? Not just now, not just for the rest of your life, but forever and ever.

That's the message of Christmas. That's its meaning. To make ordinary men and women into sons and daughters of the living God through the proclamation of this gospel message.

Paul says in another place, in Galatians chapter 4, When the fullness of the time was come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

Adoption. Because you're sons, he said, God sent the spirit of his son into our heart. The spirit who calls out, Father. Father. And that's what makes Christmas matter.

[41 : 16] Today, to you and me. Without that, the whole thing is just a lovely story. God sending his son to the world is just a memory of something that happened 2,000 years ago with no relevance to the present day, other than that we have nice songs and readings and plays at Christmas time.

But if he sends the spirit of his son into our hearts, then Christmas is repeated in our lives.

And the birth of a Savior into the world becomes the birth of a Savior into our hearts, into our lives today. And that means Christmas happens to all of us, just as it happened to those first witnesses.

The wonderful words of Mary, of the angel Gabriel to Mary, there's such a beautiful illustration of this. Just listen. He said, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

And so this holy thing to be born of you will be called the Son of God. You see, that's the heart of everything this Christmas day. Christmas with all the beauty, with all the wonder, with that message of joy, with that new life.

[42 : 30] It can happen to you. That's what the carol says. Where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in. And a holy birth can take place in your heart.

A birth from God above, coming into your personal life. In the hearing of the message of Christmas, in the hearing of the gospel, you see, in the announcement of God's Savior Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes upon a person.

And the power of the Most High God overshadows them. And something born in them is called a child of God.

And just as silently as the Lord Jesus slipped into this world at the first Christmas, just as imperceptibly, he can come into human hearts, into your heart, and impart that wonderful gift to you. Because you also are among those called to belong to Jesus Christ because the Apostle Paul is clear. It's a message to go out to all the nations.

[43 : 41] I'm looking around this morning. There's quite a lot of different nations here this morning. But this is a message for all the nations. It doesn't matter whether you come from Hong Kong or China or India or Nigeria, even England and Scotland and all the rest.

You are called in the glorious message of the gospel to belong to Jesus Christ. That's the message of Christmas. The King has sent His Son into the darkness of our world.

And He's outstretched His arms. And they're still outstretched to you today. And there are arms that bear the marks of the nails that nailed Him to the cross at Calvary.

Take away your sins forever. And the fear of death and the bondage of the evil one. For everyone who will do as those first believers did, welcome Him and welcome His message.

So if today, if this Christmas Day, you're somebody who's still on the outside, you come in and you're sort of looking in to see what this is all about, let me tell you, unequivocally, God our Father in Heaven is calling you today to belong to Jesus Christ.

[45 : 00] He's saying, will you receive me? Will you receive what I came to earth to do? To make you a child of God. To assure you that you can belong to me forever and ever.

To have the assurance of my abiding presence. And friends, He's saying to us, don't be like Herod. Don't be like the indifferent or the intolerant.

Be those who invite the Lord Jesus Christ into your life. Be like the shepherds, the wise men, and many others. Receive Him gladly. And you will have that assurance of His presence with you now and forever.

Amen. Let's pray. O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray, cast out our sin and enter in. Be born in us today. And we hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell. So come to us and abide with us.

[46 : 14] Our Lord, Emmanuel. Amen. Well, our final carol reminds us of the great mystery that we see.

What marvelous design that God should come as one of us, a son in David's line, flesh of our flesh, of woman born, our humanness He owns.

And for a world of wickedness, His guiltless blood atones. Caged by tangled with the grace of the earth.

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[49 : 18] The End The End The End The End The End And so, 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 now and forever. Amen.

And a very, very happy Christmas to all of you. Lovely to have you with us and I hope you have a wonderful and a happy day with friends and family. Thank you. Thank you.

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

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Thank you.