

# Revelation of the Promised Saviour - Festival of Christmas

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Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 00 ] Matthew chapter 1, 18-25 Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.

When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But, as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, 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.

She will bear a son, and you will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God is with us. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

[ 1 : 25 ] He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. Matthew chapter 2, verse 1-12 Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

For we saw his star when it rose, and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet, And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler, who will shepherd my people Israel.

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly, and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go, and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him.

After listening to the king, they went on their way, and behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

[ 3 : 17 ] When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly, with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him.

Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And, being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Amen. Amen. Christ's apostle, Peter, wrote a letter to Christians scattered over Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey.

And he wrote to assure them of the true grace of God. Who better to focus on the grace and mercy of God in the message of Christmas than Peter, the disciple, remember, who denied Jesus so dreadfully.

But then, of course, was restored so wonderfully to become a proclaimer of the grace of God to the world. This Christmas, we're going to look at four snapshots of Peter's letter where he tells us why it was that the Son of God came into our world.

[ 4 : 39 ] And he's very clear. He tells us that the cradle of Jesus is explained only by the cross of Jesus. Jesus' birth is explained only, really, by his death.

It tells us Jesus Christ was born to die. To be glorified through suffering in a death that brings redemption from the futility of life without God and brings restoration to a life of true human fullness

in Christ.

And at last, brings resurrection to a life of eternal glory with Christ. I'd love to invite you back next week at this time to our Carols by Candlelight and in fact, the following week and the week after, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

And I do that because I can tell you there is no more important thing that you could possibly be doing in life. There's no more important thing for any human being on this planet to know than why God became man.

There'll be a day for everyone in the world, for everyone here tonight, when the answer to that question will be the only thing that matters for all eternity. It's nothing less than life and death.

[ 5 : 57 ] This is about heaven and hell. This is about the salvation of our souls. That's how big this thing really is. Listen to what Peter says. It's written there, this little excerpt from his letter, on your programs.

Concerning this salvation, Peter says, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours, they searched and inquired carefully. Inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you in the things that have been now announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Things into which angels longed to look. See, Peter there is putting Christ's coming into the context of the whole of human history.

He's telling us that Jesus is a Savior who was long, long promised and that he came to bring revelation, the great good news of all God's promises of salvation being fulfilled at last in Jesus Christ, in the Savior.

[ 7 : 18 ] And he speaks here of wonderful promises fulfilled concerning God's wonderful plan now accomplished in Jesus and the wonderful privileges, therefore, that can be ours as a result of that.

Let's think of that. First of all, Peter says the coming of Jesus to this world means wonderful prophecies are fulfilled.

God has fulfilled his extraordinary prophecies of salvation in a fulfillment that answers all of the yearnings of the ages.

Peter speaks about the longings, the yearnings of earth and heaven over this event, the coming of Christ, the Messiah, into the world of human beings. Look there, verse 10, concerning this salvation, the prophets searched and inquired carefully.

The prophets yearned, they longed for this coming. And look at verse 12 there, the angels in heaven longed for this coming. The coming of Christ and what that would bring is something the angels longed to look into.

[ 8 : 26 ] They looked intently, they gazed in wonder and what God was going to do of what these prophets spoke. And it was a yearning of fulfillment of what God had revealed to these prophets from the very earliest times about the future, about the Messiah of Israel who would bring salvation.

The God of the Bible is a speaking God. He speaks right from the very, very beginning. He reveals his plans, his purposes to human beings through his Holy Spirit in promises, in prophecies that are given.

And these things were trusted, they were believed by those who were people, his people, and it made them long constantly for those days of fulfillment of these things. And the whole Old Testament is about that.

It's a story looking forward with longing to the great day of the Lord as the prophets called it, the day when God himself would come to this earth to judge the earth with justice, to put right all wrongs in this world, to punish all evil and wickedness, and to bring salvation to those who humbled themselves before him and welcomed him.

That's why you read at the beginning of Luke's gospel of people like old Simeon, a faithful Israelite who was waiting with longing, yearning for the consolation of Israel, yearning for the fulfillment of these extraordinary, wonderful promises about the coming Savior from God.

[ 9 : 56 ] And the whole Old Testament story is one of longing, it's one of yearning for something more, for the ultimate answer to our human condition, for the explanation of our human condition, and for salvation from all that we know is not as we would long for it to be.

Now these prophets, their messages were specific, they were guided by God's special revelation, they knew great, great privilege. But their longings actually just reflect and express something far deeper, something that is very basic to the hearts of every single human being and every culture in the world.

Right throughout history and right across the world today. Since time immemorial, human beings have been searchers, seeking answers, posing questions, feelings, feeling after meaning, feeling after a purpose, a longing, yearning for more than this mere material universe seems to afford to us. That's what makes us humans. We ask these questions, these great existential questions, and we yearn for answers. We answer, we want answers that are more solid and more satisfying than merely the answers we get from maths and science and things like that.

Although, most honest mathematicians and scientists will tell you that their discoveries that they make actually raise more questions than they bring answers.

[ 11 : 30 ] The very greatest scientists are those who will tell you, won't they, actually how little we really know from the natural sciences. But we human beings, we ask, we ask, we ask, and we yearn for more because we sense deep down we have a need for something more than the mere material.

C.S. Lewis put it very memorably when he called that feeling the unappeasable want, the inconsolable secret that is so basic to every human being. Something beyond the grasp of our consciousness, something that yearns for fulfillment.

It's what it's expressed, isn't it, with such urgency often in the world of the arts. The tragic pathos, the searching of the romantic composers like Tchaikovsky, like Rachmaninoff and others.

Or it's the aching, it's the longing that you find in the poets like Keats or Wordsworth. Or even in the bizarre distortions, the surrealist artists like Van Gogh.

All of these and myriads beside them, they're just expressing, aren't they, the yearnings, the longings, groping in the dark for a door that somewhere must be there.

[ 12 : 46 ] A door that we can open as human beings which will shed light on our world, on the present, but also will offer us hope for the future, a better future.

Now these things we know, they're deep in every human heart. If we're honest about it, we admit that, don't we? Of course, these questionings are disturbing, they're unsettling for us, so sometimes we do, perhaps most of the time, we do try and suppress these sorts of thoughts.

And the materialistic world all around us, of course, has a very vested interest in silencing all that kind of questioning from us. The National Secular Society is very active in our country, on a zealous crusade to try and silence any questionings like that in the human heart.

Don't let these kind of questions even be asked in schools, is what they want. And if need be, suppress them. And if you can't suppress these sort of questions, well, mock them, deride them, deride people for even daring to ask these sorts of questions.

It's interesting, isn't it, how zealous, how fundamentally religious so much of that scientific reductionism actually is, wants to censor all sorts of dissent, all sorts of questioning of the accepted dogmas.

[ 14 : 08 ] But despite the loud protests of our materialistic world, the truth is our yearnings, yearnings for more than just this mortal coil, they just can't be expunged from our hearts.

Do we really want to accept Macbeth's verdict on life? that life is but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more, a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing, nothing?

Is that all your life is and mine? It's interesting, I think, that even a wide atheist can't shake off the unsatisfied longing for contentment and for a real sense of meaning in life.

Listen to this, I'm quoting, it's odd isn't it? I care passionately for this world and many things and people in it and yet what is it all for?

There must be something more important one feels even though I don't believe there is. That's Bertrand Russell, perhaps one of the most famous atheists of all in our country in the past.

[ 15 : 32 ] But even he betrays that inconsolable secret, a yearning for answers, a yearning for destiny, for fulfillment, a life that doesn't just signify nothing, that isn't just a tale told by an idiot.

There is an unappeasable desire in the human heart for something more. He said it, there must be something more. And I think C.S.

Lewis did have an answer for Bertrand Russell. Here's what he said, creatures are not born with the desires unless the satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger, well, there's such a thing as food.

A duckling wants to swim, well, there's such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire, well, there's such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire, he says, which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

You see, the Bible tells us that. God has put eternity into our human hearts, yet so that he cannot fathom what God has done from the beginning to the end.

[16:49] So the yearning for more is unavoidably and unarguably there within us. But the answer is not within our power to grasp, not by ourselves, not without a revelation from eternity, from beyond us, coming into our finite world from the outside to bring the light of truth that only can illuminate all our yearnings.

And friends, that is what God has done in Jesus Christ. From the beginning, God has spoken from eternity into time and history, his spirit speaking through the prophets.

But in the coming of Jesus into the world, that revelation reached its absolute zenith of brightness. And it was all concerning this salvation, says Peter, that the prophets spoke and for which they longed, the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, the great King.

This is he whom seers in old time chanted off with one accord. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight in Bethlehem.

in the coming of Jesus Christ into the world at that first Christmas, God has fulfilled his wonderful prophecies and promises of salvation.

[18:16] And in doing so, he has given the answer to all the deepest longings of the human heart for every single person in this whole world if they'll listen to him. For every person right here in this building tonight.

night. Let's ponder that as the choir sings to us about that yearning and about its answer. wonderful prophecies are fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ and so a wonderful plan is accomplished. What is accomplished is an extraordinary plan of salvation, a plan that brings grace and mercy instead of judgment to rebellious creatures.

Through the suffering and the subsequent glory of God's Son. Jesus came to bring salvation from the consequences of human rebellion against our Creator.

And that's what Peter means here when he speaks about Jesus' suffering and then being glorified. He means that he came as promised by the prophets to suffer for his people. To offer himself as a substitute for his people and to offer his life.

[19:38] As a sacrifice for their sins. To be the sin bearer. To take away their guilt. As a just punishment for sin against God.

We're going to talk more about that in some of our coming meetings. But he suffered and then was glorified, says Peter. God raised him from the dead and gave him glory, he goes on to say. What that means is that Jesus has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels and authorities and powers having been subjected to him.

And that is God has exalted him, Jesus, as the Lord and as the judge of every creature in earth and heaven. And as the Apostles' Creed says, from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

And that's why Peter says a little further on in his letter that everyone will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

[20:50] Jesus Christ who suffered for sins is now glorified and exalted as the judge of all mankind and of every power and every spirit as well.

And he's ready now, says Peter, to judge this whole world. And that means according to the Bible that God's plan has been accomplished for this universe. It's complete.

It only awaits the consummation when Jesus returns. And there's a message that Jesus himself commanded his followers, his apostles, to go and proclaim to the world.

Peter himself tells us that later on in the Acts of the Apostles when he's speaking to Cornelius the centurion. He says, Jesus commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead.

That was the gospel that Jesus sent his church into the world to proclaim. Judgment day is coming and Jesus Christ is the judge of this world.

[ 21 : 53 ] Because Jesus who suffered has now been glorified, has been exalted to the right hand of God. You may wonder if that was the gospel that Jesus gave to his apostles to preach, why we should call the gospel good news.

Well, of course, it's because Peter went on immediately to say to Cornelius, to him, that is to Jesus, all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

See, the prophets foretold the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories as the means of forgiveness of sins.

For everyone who trusts in him as the Savior, everyone who repents towards God and receives that forgiving grace at his hand. And now God's wonderful plan is complete, says Peter, in the coming of Jesus and through his death on the cross, through his resurrection, through his ascension to glory, it's done.

The whole message of the scriptures, the whole message of the Bible from the beginning is accomplished. Jesus' last words when he hung on the cross before he died was, it is accomplished.

[ 23 : 13 ] And after he rose, Luke tells us what he said to his disciples. He opened their minds so they could understand what their scriptures had always been saying. that it was written that the Christ must suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all nations.

You see, God's plan is accomplished. And so Peter says those who trust in Christ's salvation do not need to fear that judgment to come because for them it will be a day of wonderful grace, wonderful glory.

glory. He says we can set our hope fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. And that brings me to the final thing because in the coming of Jesus into the world God has fulfilled his wonderful prophecies of salvation.

He's completed that wonderful plan of salvation. salvation. And Peter says therefore what that means is that we can receive all the wonderful privileges of that salvation.

It means that all of our deepest need is met in Christ and it's offered to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ. You see, he says that the prophets knew that they were not serving themselves but you in the thing that's now been announced to you.

[ 24 : 43 ] By those who preach the good news to you. By the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Do you see all those you? It's the immense privilege, Peter says, that's now being received by you because of what Jesus has done.

Now the you, of course, there refers to his first readers settled as they were all around the margins of the Roman Empire feeling very weak, very vulnerable, persecuted, strangers in the world.

But now he says, to you among all the peoples of the world, to all nations indeed who will believe, this immense privilege has been revealed. What the prophets of old longed to understand more fully, what the angels of heaven gazed at with wonder, has been fulfilled, has come to you.

And therefore has come to everyone in the world today who lives on this side of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. Jesus himself said the same in his own ministry.

Blessed are your eyes, he said, because they see. Blessed are your ears, because they hear. Truly I say to many prophets and righteous ones longed to see what you see and didn't.

[ 26 : 00 ] The saints of old, the hearers of faith, they looked at these things only from afar and greeted them from afar. They didn't yet have received all these things promised. Because God says the apostle had to prepare better things for us.

That we should have this message of all God's prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Christ. All his plan of salvation complete in the coming of Jesus. That's the grace, the true grace that Christmas brings.

That the Savior long promise has now come. And he's come to bring revelation, the ultimate good news of all God's promises fulfilled at last for human beings like us.

So we can find the answer to every deep longing, every deep yearning of our human hearts so that we might have hope, everlasting hope, hope that transcends even the darkness of death, which is the shadow that stalks every one of us still.

in the grace that will be brought to all who believe, says Peter, at the revelation of Jesus Christ when he comes again.

[ 27 : 19 ] What is it all for? Said Bertrand Russell. There must be something more important. Oh yes, there is.

And it's this salvation come in Jesus Christ. It's the things now announced to you in the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Savior long promised, but now come. And soon coming again. Amen. And my prayer is that God would give us all eyes to see and ears to hear the wonderful grace that comes to us in the message of Christmas, this Christmas and every day.

Amen.