

Last Minute Carols (whole service, with introductory music)

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Date: 24 December 2005

Preacher: Alex Bedford

[0 : 00] Well, good afternoon friends, and let me say a very warm welcome to you all to St George's Tron for this special last-minute shopper brief carol service. I expect some of you have been shopping and you may be just ready to sit down and relax and have a rest for half an hour or so, and we're delighted to have you here.

I'd like to say a particular thank you to Alistair Graham, who's playing the organ for us. Alistair is not one of our regular organists, but he's standing in for others today, and we're delighted to have you and thankful, Alistair, very much.

The other thing I wanted to say was that I'm sure just about everybody here would like to have a mince pie or a cup of tea or coffee after the short service is over.

So I think as if by magic we may see one or two trolleys appearing after the service, and do stay if you can. Relax, have a cuppa and a chance to chat to us, and stay as long as you can.

Good, well let's begin our service by singing together this lovely carol, O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come let us adore him. We think about the Lord Jesus Christ as we celebrate Christmas.

[1 : 03] O come all ye faithful. O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come all ye faithful.

O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come all ye tōi ly. Lord, well let us adore him, Lord, Lord, come all ye faithful and triumphant, O come all ye faithful, ulf you God, you would love for heaven.

Oh Oh Oh

Oh Oh, come let the glory, oh, come let the glory, oh, come let the glory, oh, come let the glory, Christ, Lord.

May the glory be ye, for this happy morning, lead us to thee in glory.

[3 : 56] God, O, come let the glory, oh, come let the glory, oh, come let the glory, oh, come let the glory, Christ, Lord.

Amen. Our Bible reading is taken from the Gospel of Luke, the second chapter, beginning at verse 8.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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 cloths, and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

[5 : 39] 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. Now we're going to sing a very favourite carol about the manger.

And I suggest, especially as I can see we've got quite a number of ladies and a number of children here as well, why don't we have the ladies and children only singing the second verse? So we can add those male rumbles in the first and third verses, but let's have just the ladies and the children in the second verse.

ions by ■■■ar.

He is our nature, so grateful again. The little of Jesus, they come in sweet head.

[6 : 58] The child is a righteous, who now can be raised. The little of their will cross out, help from them.

The little of my soul is a righteous, eter Torah seamox. The■■■ Horace■ames are the ones who penises in exile. And they come to know his Vedas and the khoanameu.

He gave me day. I love thee, Lord Jesus, who thou wilt rise and take our life until morning's day.

Hear thee, Lord Jesus, I am still afraid. O shining, Lord Jesus, and long thee I pray.

When all the near children may thy life never fail, and take us forever to the end of the day and take us forever.

[8 : 39] Well, I wonder if anybody here has ever had to be rescued from the sea, perhaps, from a burning building or a crashed car.

Most of us, sooner or later, have to be rescued from something. In the year 1912, in April, the Titanic was several days out of Southampton Harbour on its maiden voyage.

And modern technology had reached such a pitch of excellence in those days that the ship had been nicknamed the unsinkable Titanic. And yet, on that particular calm April night, when the ship was still hundreds of miles from its final destination in America, it struck an iceberg and sank in a matter of a few hours.

Hundreds of people were drowned, but hundreds also were able to get on board lifeboats and life rafts. And somebody managed to get an SOS message to the steamship Carpathia, which wasn't so very far away.

And on the following morning, the survivors gratefully got on board the Carpathia and were brought to safety. In fact, I think the longest-lived of them only died two or three years ago at the age of about 101.

[10 : 00] Most of us need to be rescued sooner or later. But just imagine for a moment that you had been one of the survivors on that April night in 1912.

And there you are. Imagine yourself the following morning after the dawn has come and you're sitting huddled up in a blanket or whatever you managed to get around you on one of the lifeboats or life rafts.

And then the rescue ship, the Carpathia, steams over the horizon towards you. And after a moment, it's right up there above you and somebody's looking down and shouting down to you, hold on down there, we're coming down to pick you up.

And you shout back, it's all right, thank you. We've got muscles, haven't we? We've got oars. We're very strong. We can row to America under our own steam, thank you, in just a matter of days.

You go away. We don't need you to rescue us. Would you have said that? A rescuer is a saviour.

[10 : 59] But it is possible to say to the would-be rescuer, I don't need you, thank you very much. You go away. But more of that in just a moment.

We're going to sing again. Let's take our red sheets, our next carol, O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. We can almost picture ourselves being amongst the shepherds as the baby is born there and we think about what is happening.

O little town. O little town.

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie.

God of thy need and liberty, the silent star of earth.

[12 : 00] Yet in thy rising kindness, the everlasting time.

The hope and fear of all the years are met in Jesus. All in love together, proclaim the holy earth.

And faith and faith to love the king, and peace to heaven on earth. For Christ is on our wedding, and gathered on our love.

For God of the Lord, O God of the Lord, O God of the Lord.

O God of the Lord, O God of the Lord. O God of the Lord, O God of the Lord, O God of the Lord.

[13 : 29] The God of the Lord, O God of the Lord. O God of the Lord, O God of the Lord. God bless you.

God bless you.

God bless you.

God bless you. God bless you. Now, if you had been one of the shepherds on that day and you heard that extraordinary message coming to you from heaven, how would you have responded?

I suppose you might have said, now this isn't the way the shepherds responded, but you might have said, saviour, do we really need a saviour? After all, the Lord has given us strong right arms and brain power.

[15 : 36] Here we are in the first century AD. We know a great deal about agriculture and navigation and engineering. We're cultured people. We're linguistically developed. Look at us.

We don't need a saviour, surely. And in the 21st century, 2,000 years later, we might say something rather similar with a few more modern additions. We might say, well, look at our technology these days.

Look at our medical skill. Look at our trans-global powers of communication. Can't we sort ourselves out? Isn't it a bit pathetic for the human race to say that we need to be rescued when we're so capable?

Can't we manage the job ourselves? Well, let me ask three questions, three simple questions about rescue, and then try to give answers to those questions from the Bible.

So here's the first question. What do we need to be rescued from? It's certainly true that science and medicine and engineering and technology have been developed to a wonderful degree, and they have great power to improve the human lot of many, many people today.

[16 : 46] But when the Bible speaks of our need of rescue, it's not thinking about rescue from hunger or disease or poverty or ignorance or unhappiness.

In fact, it's not thinking about rescue from anything within this world at all. According to the Bible, what we need to be rescued from, and it's a surprising thought perhaps to modern people, but what we need to be rescued from is the judgment of God and the anger of God which we deserve, because we have rebelled against him.

We are rebels. The Bible teaches us that we have spurned God's loving authority over our lives, and we have opted instead for self-rule. We've said to God, in effect, we can do without you, thank you.

We can organize ourselves and our world in such a way that the theme tune of our modern world can be glory to man in the highest. And God is angry with the human race because we have not acknowledged him, the great creator, the supreme being, as our king.

We have neither loved him, nor trusted him, nor delighted in him. We may have spent days and weeks without thinking of him at all. We may have theoretically acknowledged his existence, but we haven't allowed him to make a scrap of difference to the way that we actually live our lives out day by day.

[18 : 11] Am I right? Is that the way we are by nature? And that is why God is angry with us, and that is why the Bible says we are under his condemnation, and we are by nature hell-bound.

And if he didn't rescue us from the consequences of his anger, who could? Could science or technology? We need a better saviour than that.

So there's our first question. What do we need to be rescued from? The Bible's answer is not from anything in this world, but rather from God's anger and his final condemnation.

Now a second question. What are human beings rescued for, according to the Bible? Well the Bible's answer again is not for anything in this world.

Now that is not to say that being a Christian will not bring a considerable amount of happiness in this life, in this world. It certainly does. Being a Christian brings a great sense of purpose, and an enjoyment of this life, and a sense of security, which can never be derived from wealth, or status, or possessions, or success.

[19 : 20] But the Bible tells us that Christ has come to rescue people for eternity, for an eternal kingdom. This little carol that we sang a moment ago, Away in a Manger, has it just right.

Just look with me back at the last line of the carol. We've sung it so often, it's easy to skim over the lines and not really take in what they're saying. But there's the last line. And fit us for heaven.

Not for this world, you see, but for heaven. To live with thee there. So the Bible always lifts our vision, away from this world, to the great vistas of eternity.

To heaven on the one hand, to hell on the other. Now all of us are going to die sooner or later. In fact, probably sooner. Despite what the media say, about the lifespan of Glaswegians, we've heard a lot of this recently, haven't we?

You know, too much deep fried this and that. Despite all that, the statistic is the same for Glaswegians as it is for anybody else. One out of one. We shall all die.

[20 : 20] Years ago, I knew an old man who was very proud of his muscles and his physique. He was actually paralysed from the waist downwards, but he sat up in bed every day and did these tremendous muscle exercises with dumbbells and weights and so on.

He built up a great chest and arms. And I was visiting him once, and he said to me, Do you know, Edward, I'm so fit and well, I honestly think sometimes that I'm never going to die. He did die.

Only a year or two later, actually, after he'd said that to me. So, he never, this particular man, as far as I knew, allowed Jesus Christ to rescue him because he was still thinking in terms of what he could do for himself.

He held out. He wouldn't capitulate. He would never admit that he needed to be rescued. So, Jesus came from heaven to rescue people for heaven.

Now, a third question. Is everybody rescued by Jesus? Well, I'm sure you know the Bible's answer. You know that the answer is no.

[21 : 24] The Bible teaches us that God loves every man and every woman and every boy and every girl so deeply that he sent the rescuer, Jesus, to pay our debt, the debt of our rebellion and sin, by dying on the cross for us.

But the Lord God doesn't force anyone to accept Jesus as saviour. He commands us to accept him, certainly. He tells us that if we have a particle of good sense, we will accept Christ as the saviour, as our saviour.

But he doesn't force anyone to. And some people will always turn away when they hear the good news that there is a rescuer. There are some who will always turn away because they know that accepting Christ as their saviour will entail submitting to him as their master.

And they don't want that because they want to keep self-rule. They don't want to submit to somebody else. But think of the issues. Think of eternity. Any of us could step into eternity this week, this very night.

When the shepherds heard that there was a saviour, how did they respond? They weren't indifferent to this good news. They left their sheep on the hills they rushed off to Bethlehem and they found him.

[22 : 42] So let me say this. If you're not yet a Christian and I imagine in a crowd of this size there are bound to be quite a number who are not yet Christians. Wouldn't you like to be like the shepherds?

Discovering that there is after all a rescuer. You may have gone through decades of life. You might be middle-aged or older and yet you've never discovered this great and wonderful Lord Jesus.

It is a life-changing discovery to make. In fact, it changes not only our lives to discover the Lord Jesus but our eternal destiny. So friends, the good news is still there.

Still the angels make this announcement. Still the preachers preach it. It is still true. It is still available to be heeded by anyone who will. To you is born this day in the city of David a saviour who is Christ the Lord.

If you haven't yet will you come to him? God commands it. Well let's turn now to our last carol.

[23 : 46] Hark the Herald Angels Sing a great carol which sums up the essence of the gospel the good news about Jesus. Hark the Herald. Hark the Herald Angels Sing artillery Lilly the Mix of tinge tune in Grandma Longwood fünf

War from I run, Gary, my, Lord Christ the kolom, God King, Lord Hail his mighty holy Of favored love of his renown Hail him, flesh, além of a man Hail There are boards of Jesus Father and Arena, thy battle Our faith is strong Glory to the svlce VMware In the hands of angels' knees

Hail the God of thy new friends Thine and life you all be free With great healing in his wings My feelings will all be fine From that man who will be found On the great earth and the earth On the great earth and the earth On the great earth and the earth In the hands of angels' knees Glory to the earth and the glory of me Do be seated as we pray at the end of our time together.

Let us pray. Hark the herald angels sing Glory to the newborn king Dear God, our Father, we acknowledge with great joy At this Christmas time that you have looked down upon the world With compassion and love Not content to leave us under your condemnation But to show how much and how deeply you love us You have sent us this wonderful saviour, your own son So that he might bear the consequences of our sinfulness Upon his own shoulders on the cross And that we, by believing and trusting in him And submitting to his lordship May know what it is to be rescued ourselves So we thank you for him We do pray that this Christmas time As we think again of his wonderful birth You will fill our hearts afresh with joy And delight And give us the sense of thrill

As we know him and get to know him better And for any here who may never have yet come to him And acknowledge their need of being rescued We pray that you will bless them And help them to open their hearts to him And to submit gladly to his loving and wonderful rule So dear Father, have mercy upon each of us Please meet our needs Please encourage those who need special encouragement And please help us indeed To love you, to trust you And to know what it is to be rescued And all these things we ask in Jesus' name Amen Well friends, it's been lovely to have you here Do stay, as I say Because there will be a lovely rumbling of wheels in a moment And coffee and mince pies will appear And it may be that some of you would like to talk to me Or to one of the other of the leaders here About being a Christian And we're very happy to discuss all these things with you We also have an interesting range of books and CDs available here And I think also in the porch way Do browse through those

[28 : 59] And buy whatever you'd like to Thank you very much Thank you