

Jesus Christ Came into the world to bring Light: Christmas is about the Revelation of God

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[0 : 00] The good news that we've been rejoicing about in these carols is not just the story of Christmas, but the message of Christmas. The good news from God to people of all times and all places, all nations in the world.

That's been the church's message from the very beginning. Listen to this last very brief reading, just one verse from Paul's first letter to Timothy, which sums up why Jesus Christ came into this world and tells us that he came to bring the light of God's self-revelation, to be proclaimed to all the nations and believed on in this world.

The apostle of Christ says this, Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness. He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world and taken up in glory.

We're going to think a little in a few moments about this message of Christmas as the great revelation of God himself in the flesh. But first, let's sing one more of perhaps the best love carols of all that speaks of the light of God's love being made known in our world.

Son of God, oh how bright, love is smiling from thy face, strikes for us now the hour of grace, Saviour, since thou art born.

[1 : 27] fellowship in thy life, opened thy north, apostle of God.

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Savior, since the Lord. Please be seated.

Well, there's far too much to say about why Jesus Christ came into our world for just one carol service. So I do hope that you'll come back and join us again to hear more. But I do want to focus this evening on just this one verse from 1st Timothy chapter 3.

[4 : 46] It'll be familiar to those of us in the church here because we've been studying this letter recently, the words of the Apostle Paul. Here's what he says in 1st Timothy 3 verse 15. Great indeed we confess is the mystery of godliness.

He was manifested in the flesh. Now Paul's saying there the same absolutely astonishing thing that John the Apostle begins his gospel with.

Where he says that the one who was in the beginning, the one through whom all things were made, the one in whom is life itself, he became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we have seen his glory. Jesus Christ, he is saying, came into this world to bring light. Christmas is all about the revelation of God to humanity.

Jesus Christ is the unique, the ultimate, the universal revelation of God to all humanity. He came to show us the real truth about God.

[5 : 53] And in doing so, he came to bring the revelation that answers all of our deepest human longings and all of our deepest human needs.

Paul speaks there about a mystery. But don't be mistaken. Whenever the Bible uses that word mystery, it is to speak about something that is no longer a mystery because God himself has explained it.

He has made it known. And that's so here. It's a mystery no longer, says Paul, because it's a mystery made manifest. God's extraordinary truth has been revealed, has been manifested in the flesh, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, the Bible's point there is clear, isn't it? That without that revelation of God in Christ, the world would still be shrouded in mystery, in darkness. And indeed it is where the revelation of Jesus Christ is ignored or is unknown.

So I want for a few minutes this evening just to examine the claim of the Bible, the claim all through the Bible, that the coming of Jesus Christ is indeed the manifest answer of God to all the mysterious agonies of our human condition, of our life as we know it to be in this world.

[7 : 17] Now, you yourself might be a skeptic about these things. I understand that. Or perhaps you just don't know what you think. But will you hear me out? Will you bear with me as I try as best as I can to articulate how the Bible explains and describes our world and its real problems and the answers that the Bible proclaims in the person of Jesus Christ?

Let me start with us, with our own experience of life on this earth. I think it's not unfair, is it, to call that the universal agony of humanity, the agonizing mysteries of our mortal human life, which is so full often of darkness and of despair.

I think it's true to say that our experience of life as human beings is full of unresolved tensions. We live in a world of great beauty. And yet at the same time, that beauty, not only in the world of nature, but also in the world of our humanity, that beauty coexists alongside great barbarity.

Perhaps at Christmas time, more than any other time, we get glimpses, don't we, of the beauty and the love in the human spirit. It's a season of peace, of goodwill. It's a time for giving.

It's a time for expressing love. It's a time for acts of kindness and generosity. And that's lovely to behold, isn't it? Come on, we say to somebody who's being Scrooge-like. It's Christmas.

[8 : 43] Join in the joy. Join in the fun. And in the end, even old Ebenezer Scrooge does join the joy, doesn't he? And at Christmas, all the feel-good movies will be rolled out again on television.

Films like Love Actually. There's no accident, is it, that all the love stories in that film are centered around Christmas. And the theme song of that film, Christmas, is all around.

It's an adaptation, isn't it, of love is all around. I feel it in my fingers. I feel it in my toes. Love is all around. And love is all around at Christmas time. Beauty. Kindness.

All that is genuinely lovely in human existence. And that's especially evident at Christmas. Actually, that's quite interesting in itself, don't you think?

What is it about Christmas that does that? My last Christmas at school was 1984. Those of you who remember will remember. That was the year that Band-Aid got together to raise money for the Ethiopian famine.

[9 : 41] And whatever you think of Bob Geldof and all the rest, it was a beautiful thing. It was a generous and a loving response to fellow human beings. So don't be in any doubt about it.

There is real beauty in our human world. No one wants to deny that. But there is also great barbarity, isn't there? There's great hate as well as great love.

There's so many things that make us ashamed. Just as many, I suspect, as there are things that make us proud as human beings. Famines, like the one that Band-Aid was put together to help.

They're far more often due to war and oppression and great corruption in governments than they are just due to the weather, aren't they? And in fact, even the extreme weather, we're told these days, is being affected by human thoughtlessness, by greed, by exploitation.

And so we live with that tension. And we see human beings so creative, so creative of beauty in the arts, in music, in song, in poetry, in architecture, in so many things.

[10 : 50] Above all, of course, in the beauty of giving and receiving human love. But we also see human beings so destructive in wars, in terrorism, in corruption.

All sorts of ways, but also, of course, much closer to home for most of us, in the losing and in the poisoning of human love. In love that turns to hate, that turns to resentment, to breakup, to rupture.

And all the agonies that these things bring to our human lives. It's an agonizing mystery, being human. This tension that we have to live with.

Of both great creative beauty, on the one hand, and great destructive horror, on the other. How do we explain all these unresolved tensions?

And how do we explain another fact of our humanity that we can't deny? The unrequited longings of our hearts. I don't just mean unrequited love. Christmas, of course, is a time for wistful thoughts about that, too, isn't it?

[11 : 59] I think the number two record in 1984, if I remember rightly, to band-aid, was Wham! Last Christmas. That's a song all about unrequited love, isn't it? Last Christmas, I gave you my heart.

And the very next day, you gave it away. Funny how you remember all those songs from your school days, isn't it? Actually, every time I hear that song, I can still see the face of the older sister of a friend of mine at a certain party.

But, no, actually, I'm not going to tell you any more about that story. But there's a lot of unrequited love in the world, isn't there? And that's very painful.

But there are also other, deeper longings in all of our hearts. And when we're honest for a moment, when we really listen to the yearnings that rise up deep within us, there are yearnings for more, yearnings for something better, yearnings for something that we feel must be out there in life, but we just haven't quite yet grasped it.

Even the happiest people, even the most fulfilled people have these yearnings. The writer C.S. Lewis called that the unappeasable want, the inconsolable longing in the heart for we know not what.

[13 : 15] And even a wide atheist like Bertrand Russell can't shake off that unsatisfied longing for the contentment of a really deep and satisfying understanding of the meaning of life.

Here's what he said, one of the world's most celebrated atheists. Listen, he says, 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. I don't believe there is. And he's expressing that inconsolable longing, that tension, the unresolved mysteries of mortal life.

But he's trying to deny it. And as C.S. Lewis points out, almost our whole education, he says, has been directed to silencing this shy, persistent inner voice.

Almost all modern philosophies have been devised to convince us that the good of man is to be found in this earth alone. Now, I think that's probably true now in this country, isn't it?

[14 : 20] It is certainly true in China. A lady here from China told me recently that her whole education under communism was directed at precisely that, the quenching of that voice within that seeks and searches for more and wants more and asks, where is that more to be found?

But that voice couldn't be quenched in her, even by the full force of the Chinese Communist Party. And it can't be quelled in any one of us, friends, can it?

At our most honest, heart-searching moments. As C.S. Lewis says again, do what they will then, we remain conscious of a desire which no natural happiness will satisfy.

He says, creatures are not born with desires unless 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. And he says, if I find within myself a desire that no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

[15 : 36] And that is the Bible's explanation for this universal agony of humanity. For the deep desires and longings for fulfillment, for love, for belonging, for identity, for we know not quite what.

We just know we haven't yet found it. The Bible tells us that God created us for himself and for an eternal world, a world of beauty and bounty that even the very best of this world's highest beauty and experiences are merely pale shadows of.

He created us to know him and to love him and to be like him. In creating man, God gave us his heart.

And yet, almost the very next day, we threw it away. And we've lived with the agony of that ever since. The beginning of the Bible, Genesis chapter 3, tells that story very graphically.

The rebellion in Eden. But in Romans chapter 1, the apostle Paul tells it starkly and bluntly. Claiming to be wise, he says, human beings became utter fools, exchanging the glory of an infinite God and the truth of God for a lie and turning from the worship of God the creator to the worship of themselves, mere created mortals.

[17 : 03] Mortals. And the result? Well, Paul says, God gave human beings what they asked for. He gave them up to doing it our way.

And the result is the world that we all know and that we live in. Which is not, is it, the utopian world that John Lennon sang about and said if people would only imagine there's no heaven above and no God, we would be living in.

Do we see all the people living life in peace? Those tinted specks of John Lennon must have been very, very rose-tinted, don't you think? Now the world we have chosen in rejecting our creator is a world of war, a world of strife, a world of misery, and a world full of universal, agonized longing for that lost world that instinctively deep down we crave and long for because we were created for it and we can't find it inside this fallen existence.

Don't you sense that agonizing mystery deep down in your own soul? We may try and crowd it out with noise, with busyness, with all sorts of other things, but aren't there times when you wonder in the darkness of a sleepless night, in the face of tragedy perhaps, or pain, maybe in the face of a bereavement.

Don't you find yourself saying with Bertrand Russell, there must be something more important? I do think that most of us do. And what we are experiencing is simply what the Bible says, that God has put eternity into the human heart.

[18 : 51] But because of our sin, we cannot find out what God has been doing from the beginning to the end. We're in a fog. We crave the light. We long for the light.

We feel it must be there. But our rebellion against God has left us in the dark. And that's the universal agony of man. Life is an agonizing mystery of tension.

But you see, Paul says here that in Jesus Christ coming into this world, we have the unique answer of God.

The answer manifested in the human flesh of God the Son, in which the mystery of God has been made known uniquely, universally, to bring light, to bring hope in the place of darkness and in the place of despair.

He was manifested in the flesh. But who and what was manifested in the flesh of Jesus Christ? Well, Paul loves to call Him God our Savior.

[19 : 57] Listen to what he says writing to Titus. When Jesus came into our world, he says, the grace of God appeared bringing salvation for all people. When the goodness, the loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us.

You see, He is the God of such loving kindness and He so loved, even brazen, rebellious rejecters of His love, He came to save them.

The God made manifest in the flesh is God our Savior. And that's because He is the God of love. The God who is love. That's perhaps one of the best known things that the Bible says, that God is love.

But just listen to what the Apostle John actually says in full. God is love. And in this, the love of God was made manifest. Notice the words. Manifest among us that God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

How so? Well, he goes on, in this is love. Not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

[21 : 09] That means to turn away God's justified anger at our sinful rejection of Him. By God Himself bearing that anger, bearing that punishment for our sins so that we might find that life that He made us for.

That life that deep down our human spirit longs for. He's the God who saves because He is the God who is love.

One of the carols says it. Love came down at Christmas. Love, all lovely, love divine. Love was born at Christmas. Star and angels gave the sign.

He's the God who saves because the true God made known to this world is love. And the true God, the only God, is love because He is Trinity.

in the incarnation of the Son of God through the power of the Holy Spirit, God the Father is revealed to this world. We heard the angel say to Mary in Luke chapter 1, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High God will overshadow you.

[22 : 26] Therefore, the child born will be called holy, the Son of God. We don't have time tonight, but if you read through John's Gospel for yourself, you'll see all through Jesus is constantly saying He was revealing the Father in heaven.

And He says, I and the Father are one. If you have seen Me, you've seen the Father. He tells His disciples about when He will rise from the dead and ascend to heaven and says, the Holy Spirit will come down and be with you just as Jesus had been with them on earth so that they will not be orphans.

And that through the Holy Spirit of God, both the Father and the Son would make their home with every Christian believer. And we could go on and on, but what is absolutely unmistakable is that according to Jesus Himself, the God who is made manifest in the world through Him is the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and no other.

And you see, it's that God and that God alone who is love in His very being. Because only the triune God, one God in three persons, only a God like that can be love in Himself with no need of others to love.

Because the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have shared perfect love within themselves forever. And that means, you see, that God created human beings to love them not because He needed someone to love.

[23 : 58] Freddie Mercury sang that, didn't it? We all need someone to love. Well, that might be true of us. Indeed, it is fundamentally true of us human beings because we are made for the love of a loving God.

But God doesn't need someone to love. He is love. And there has been perfect, beautiful love within the Godhead all through eternity. It's because God is triune, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that we can say God is love within Himself perfectly.

abundantly. Only of the triune God can love be the ultimate truth about His nature. So yes, the Bible tells us God is powerful, He is mighty, He is glorious, He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, but it is love that is primary.

He is love. God is God who is truly sovereign is manifested in the flesh as Savior because, as John 3.16 tells us so marvelously, because God so loved the world of rebellious, recalcitrant human beings.

He so loved that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. God is manifest in this world as Savior because God is love.

[25 : 25] And He is love because He is the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It couldn't be, you see, that a unipersonal God like the God of Islam or any other religion, that such a God could be love in Himself.

that God would have to create in order to love. That means then that for a God like that, it's God's power that is primary.

It can't be His love. You can't love if there's no other to love. But you see, the true God didn't create in order to love. There was love in the Godhead from all eternity.

No, the true God created to share His love, to give His love, not to get love. And so the true God's power and the true God's glory is all conditioned and characterized by His love.

Not the other way around. His power and His might and His sovereignty express and extend His love. And that's why the Bible shows us that the greatest display of God's almighty sovereign power was at the place where He poured out His love for human beings at the cross and in His own body bore away our sins so that, as John said, we might live through Him.

[26 : 54] In this is love, not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. there is divine power manifest serving the divine love.

And we know instinctively deep down, don't we, that love is more foundational, that it is more important than power. Because we feel terribly sorry for somebody, don't we, who has amassed huge power, huge wealth, huge prestige, influence, possessions, all these things, but is lonely and isolated and devoid of real relationship of human love.

We don't want to be that person on our deathbed, do we? And that's because deep down within ourselves, we know that love is primary, that it's foundational, that it's what we as human beings were made for.

and that's because, friends, we are made in the image of the triune God who is himself love. And that is the God that has been made manifest in this world in the person of Jesus Christ.

Through the Holy Spirit's power, God the Son was incarnate in the flesh to reveal God the Father truly and flawlessly and forever. And that means that in Jesus Christ, we can know the only true God as he truly is.

[28 : 31] He was manifest in the flesh. God our Savior made known. So there is nothing un-God-like at all in the person of Jesus Christ.

Read through the Gospels, you will see there is nothing, nothing at all in the Gospel that will ever make you ashamed of Jesus Christ. He did not take young girls pre-puberty to wife.

He did not exploit his enemies and call people to raise arms against them. It was the grace and the goodness and the loving kindness of God that he manifested here on this earth.

And just as importantly, there is nothing un-Jesus-like in God. He has made God truly known. There is no other side of God that we don't know that we might have to fear. No dark side, no disappointing side.

He has shown us the true God. Yes, he is holy. And Jesus himself was absolutely plain about that.

[29 : 34] He is utterly true and utterly just. He will judge all people. And there will be no escaping from his justice. Jesus. But the message of Christmas is that the God who is love was manifested in Jesus Christ to save from that judgment.

That's why Paul, who wrote these words, said that his whole life was given to teaching and striving to proclaim the great message of hope, the living God, the Savior of all who believe.

Friends, Jesus Christ came into this world to bring light and so to bring hope. There's so much hopelessness, so much despair in our world, so much to disappoint in the human condition.

And there's only so much that pills and psychologies or indeed prosperity, there's only so much that these things can do to alleviate it. even if you're the happiest, cheeriest, most fulfilled person alive, there is one professional service that you will not be able to avoid.

And that's the undertaker. But the message of Christmas is that there is hope. There is hope in the living God who is the loving God.

[30 : 50] It was made manifest in the flesh so that we might live through him. And that's why Paul says all through this letter, take hold of eternal life.

Put your trust in him. He was manifest in the flesh to be proclaimed to all the nations and to be believed on in this world. That's why he came. Jesus Christ is the unique and ultimate and universal revelation of God to all humanity.

He came to show us the truth about God. And he came to lead us to the one who alone can meet all our longings and all our deepest needs.

Why would you ever want to resist and not receive the call of God our Savior? The God whose sovereign power serves his saving love.

Amen. Let's pray. Take hold of eternal life.

[32 : 12] O come, all you faithful, joyful, triumphant. Come ye to Bethlehem. Come and behold him, born the King of angels. Come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Gracious God, may you grant that to be the response of all of our hearts this Christmas. For Jesus' sake.

Amen. Amen. do. Amen. times and last