

Christ: The Ultimate Light of Revelation - Christmas Eve Carols

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, welcome everybody to Christmas Eve by candlelight here at the Tron Church, Kelvin Grove in Glasgow. Our story tonight begins not on earth, but in heaven, because the Christmas story, of course, is first of all God's story, not the story of a distant God.

But in the coming of Jesus Christ, what we have is the ultimate light of divine revelation right here on this earth. Jesus Christ unveils definitive light, revealing the very heart of the eternal God to human beings. To bring supreme light into our dark world, he came down from earth, from heaven to earth, the one who is God and Lord of all. Our first carol.

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[5 : 19] Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them. And God blessed them.

And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

[6 : 48] Wonderful picture there of the world as it's meant to be, as God created it to be, as we would love it to be.

Perfect peace and harmony between male and female, humans and the natural world, and human beings and God. No wonder the next carol we're going to sing calls us to sing praise to our creator God for such a wonderful creation.

But notice, when we come to the last line of the carol, it tells another story. We praise God, yes, who made heaven and earth of naught, but also, it says, because with his own blood, mankind has bought.

And after the carol, the next reading, we'll begin to explain why that had to be so. To be continued... To be continued...

To be continued... Thank you.

[8 : 38] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[11 : 08] Thank you.

Thank you.

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Thank you.

[13 : 38] Thank you.

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[16 : 08] Thank you.

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[18 : 38] Thank you.

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[21 : 38] Thank you.

Thank you.

And that cost.

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[24 : 08] Thank you.

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Thank you.

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[26 : 38] Thank you.

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[29 : 08] Thank you.

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[31 : 38] Thank you.

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[34 : 08] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

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Thank you.

[36 : 38] to reveal himself.

Thank you.

shows us.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[39 : 07] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

message of Christmas. God himself invading the world that he has made to reveal himself ultimately forever in Jesus Christ, the word made flesh.

I only need to talk like this for a second to realize that for such a thing to happen, for the unseen creator to make himself known, it must be a revelation from heaven to earth.

[41 : 37] It could never be possibly, could it, an inquiry from earth to heaven? That's the quest of human philosophy, human religion. And it's hopeless because it begins with man. And we say, oh, well, we'll find a creator God. That's like someone in the story trying to find the author. That's like James Bond going along to Q in his workshop and saying, Q, I know there must be an author out there somewhere. Can you make us some gadgets to get us out of this story? And we'll get in and we'll go and find him together. It's preposterous.

But actually that is really what people, I guess people like Richard Dawkins and others are saying when they say, oh, we've got no proof of God's existence. We haven't found it. Well, it's like James Bond saying, well, we've got no proof of Ian Fleming. Or it's like Harry Potter saying, oh, no, no, we've no proof that there's a J.K. Rowling. How could they even know there was such a person? These creators of these stories live in a world right outside and beyond the whole sphere of these characters' existence? But John says here, though no one has ever seen God, how could the characters in the story see their creator? Though no one has ever seen God, he has made himself known in his one and only son, Jesus Christ, in a glorious person in our history, who is himself God and who has come, as John says, sublimely from the Father's side into our world to reveal the Godhead to us ultimately. Now, friends, without that revelation, skeptics like Richard Dawkins and so on will be quite right, of course. Without true self-revelation of God by God himself, well, all human religion, mere human religion, it's just futile. It's just ignorance. No matter how sophisticated it can be. I mean, the apostle Paul encountered very sophisticated religion in Athens, very intellectual, very aesthetic, very erudite.

But he pointed to their shrine, to the unknown God, and he said, you're worshiping ignorantly. You don't know what you're doing. The word he uses there in the Greek is agnosis, where we get our word agnostic without knowing. The Latin equivalent, though, is ignoramus. It's a bit more offensive, isn't it? Have you noticed how we prefer Greek words, by the way, to Latin words?

The rule of the people, the rule of the demos gives us democracy. That's good, isn't it? The rule of the people in Latin, the populus, gives us populism. That's bad, apparently.

Funny, isn't it, how we seem to have a sort of Greek snobbery here. We even do it with the dreaded variants, don't we? Delta and Omicron and all the rest of it. I've known plenty of folk who very happily called themselves agnostics. I haven't known too many people who very happily call themselves ignoramuses. Have you?

[45 : 00] But that's what Paul's saying. And either way, you see, what John is saying is that this that he is speaking of is not ignorance. It's not unknowing agnosticism, human searching. It is ultimate, divine revelation, unlike any other in all human history.

This is the ultimate light of almighty God made known himself in a real and glorious person in human history, in the flesh of Jesus Christ.

And he tells us that we have the climax of divine revelation in two very definite ways. First of all, in verse 14, you see, he says it's the climax of God's glory made known. He dwelled among us and we have seen his glory.

The word dwelled there is literally a word that means to pitch his tent. He tabernacled among us. And that's a deliberate reference to the tabernacle, the tent of God, which went with the Israelites all through their wilderness wanderings and which was surrounded by the dazzling glory of God himself all the time.

And the tabernacle and then later on the permanent temple in Jerusalem that it gave way to. That was the most glorious place in the universe.

[46 : 27] It was the footstool of God himself on this earth. But you see what John is saying here, even that majestic glory of the tabernacle and the temple, even that was superseded in the bodily presence of Jesus Christ.

In whom God himself tabernacled among us in the flesh. And that is the glory that John and many others like him saw in Jesus Christ.

They saw the glory of the Father's only Son. In Jesus is seen the climax, the ultimate light of the glory of God.

And secondly, the incarnation also reveals the ultimate light of God's grace towards our human world. Verse 16, from his fullness we have received grace upon grace.

Grace that supersedes all the former grace that God has shown. What does he mean? Well, he goes on in the next verse to say that even the grace that came through Moses in the ancient times of the law.

[47 : 41] Although that revelation to Moses on Sinai was magnificent, was glorious, even that is eclipsed entirely by the grace and truth greater by far that came in Jesus Christ.

Have a think about that claim. If you read about what happened at Sinai, you'll know that God revealed his glory to Moses and it was so magnificent. Moses had to hide in the cleft of a rock so that he didn't dare look at the glory lest he be consumed and destroyed.

And God passed by him while he was hiding in that rock and he proclaimed the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God abounding in grace and covenant love and in truth, covenant faithfulness.

Grace and truth. And you see, God's great glory full of grace and truth, it was revealed to Moses magnificently, so magnificently it was overwhelming.

What could possibly be greater than such a revelation? Well, John says, this is greater, far greater, the incarnation in Jesus Christ.

[49 : 00] Here is a revelation of God's grace that crowns that grace ultimately. Here's the fulfillment, here's the ultimate light of revelation of all God's glory, all his grace in human flesh, showing us literally God in the flesh among us.

Everything that Moses spoke of, everything the prophets longed for, at last, this climax is fulfilled. In the glorious light of Jesus Christ, in the Son of God made man.

And that's the message of Christmas. Veiled in flesh, the Godhead seen. Hail, the incarnate deity. Nothing less than the last word about God for our world, revealed in a glorious person in history, in Jesus Christ.

but also revealed ultimately in a real and glorious place in human history. Verse 14, again, John says, we have seen his glory.

Now, the we there, of course, isn't you and me, not people generally, it's John himself and the other apostles like him who actually saw Jesus with their own eyes.

[50 : 28] that word isn't metaphorical for seeing. It really means to observe with the eyes, to literally see. John uses it again in his first letter later on in the New Testament to emphasize that he says we're speaking about what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have looked upon and touched.

Nothing vague, it's absolutely specific and definite. We saw the ultimate glory of God on earth with my own eyes, he's saying.

What do you think he means? Where and when did their eyes see the ultimate light of God's glory in Jesus Christ? Christ. Well, for John it clearly wasn't in the cradle at Bethlehem because John doesn't tell us anything about Bethlehem or the shepherds or the angels or anything that Luke and the others do.

Nor was it in the glory of the Mount of Transfiguration when Jesus was glorified because although John was there, we know that from the other Gospels, he doesn't mention that in his Gospel either, isn't that extraordinary?

Right at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, remember there's a question that the Magi from the East have when they come and they say, where is he who is born King of the Jews?

[51 : 55] They're looking for a king. For John in his Gospel, there's only one place, one place where he wants us to see the glory of this great King.

The ultimate climax of God's kingly glory made known on earth in one unique glorious place in history. Jesus himself announces it later on in John chapter 12.

The hour has come, he said, for the Son of Man to be glorified. Now, now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. When was that?

It was the very moment that Judas betrayed him to death. Where is he who is the king?

Well, in John's Gospel, Jesus is only named king as he is being nailed to the cross in the titulus above his head that said, Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews.

[53 : 06] Where in all human history, has the ultimate light of the true glory of God been seen by real human eyes, literally? And the answer?

In the person of God incarnate. Yes, in the word made flesh in Jesus Christ, but more than that, in the place where the word was made sin for a lost world of human beings like you and me.

In Christ, the Son of God incarnate in our flesh and in God, the Son himself, immolate for our sins upon the cross.

That's where the ultimate light of God is revealed truly at last for mankind, where it was seen with real eyes by real people in real history. We have seen his glory full of grace and truth.

You can't ever separate the cradle of Jesus from the cross of Jesus. Only together, only together do you have the ultimate revelation of God's true glory and grace.

[54 : 28] And the place of glory wasn't ultimately a cradle in a stable. It was a cross on Calvary's hill. Rembrandt, the great Dutch master painter, he understood that.

You know his masterpiece, The Adoration of the Shepherds, that beautiful stable scene and all the light, all the light in the picture is emanating from the cradle, from the Christ child, lighting up all the other characters.

And subtly in the background, that light casts shadows on the beams of the stable, so that there's the shape of a cross, even there.

And the carol writers too, they understood it. That's why so often they speak eloquently of a saviour for whom the darkness of the cross overshadows even the deprivations of his birth. Like Mary, let us ponder in our mind God's wondrous love in saving lost mankind, trace we the babe who has retrieved our loss from his poor manger to his bitter cross.

Or another, there was no room at Bethlehem for him who left his throne to seek the lost at countless cost and make our griefs his own. But there was room at Calvary upon a cross of shame for him to die uplifted high and bear the sinner's blame.

[55 : 56] glory. And there you see that a real place in history is the height and the depth of the glory of God, says John.

And we saw it with our own eyes. And this is the message that we proclaim to you. This is he, cried John the Baptist.

Christ. This is our God made known in all his zenith of ultimate glory. In the person of Christ and at the place of his cross.

And you see, friends, that's why this is a message which has so often been rejected by so many, because to our world, that is just a scandalous idea of divine glory.

Certainly to any pious Jew, the very idea of God, the Lord, in human flesh, that was scandalous enough. But a humiliation, a death on a cross, that was unthinkable. Just as to a Muslim, the idea of such a thing would be a blasphemy.

[57 : 08] And just as to many secularists today, it just makes no sense, just foolishness, just as it was to the Greeks in Mars Hill with all their learning. But John says, I saw it with my own eyes.

And when I saw it, it changed the world for me forever. At one time, John was just like everybody else. He had a very different idea of what real glory was.

It was all about strength. It was all about position. It was all about achievement. And John and his brother actually made a bid, didn't they? Got their mother involved too on their side to try and parter with Jesus.

They get the top seats in the glorious coming kingdom. But then at last, you see, John saw true glory.

The glory of God himself, the Son of God, lifted high on a cross in a shameful criminal's death to give himself to save rebellious scornful enemies.

[58 : 19] And that day when God opened his eyes, he changed his heart forever. And at last he understood the definitive light of truth about the very heart of God himself.

And those two things always go together because when someone does see God's true glory in Christ and his death on the cross for their sins, then their heart will be changed. It can't not be changed.

If it's not yet truly changed, then somebody hasn't yet really grasped God's glory as it actually is. But what John saw, you see, he wrote down so that you and I also can know and understand from his solid witness what he saw firsthand.

so that we can know God's word of ultimate revelation of himself for all of us, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, as Paul puts it, in the face of Jesus Christ.

What he saw, he wrote. And he proclaims to us today. And friends, Christmas is a great time.

[59 : 34] It's a wonderful time to open your eyes and see the glory of Jesus Christ, the ultimate light of revelation of God to our dark world.

That's my prayer this Christmas, that God will open eyes and keep opening them day by day to see his glory. And so people, in seeing that, will have their hearts changed forever to share that eternal glory with him.

Amen. Let's pray. Oh God, who makes us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of your only son, Jesus Christ, grant that as we joyfully receive him for our redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our judge, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end.

Amen. Well, our closing carol reminds us that the message of Christmas is the fulfillment of God's unshakable plan from all eternity, which now wonderfully can be a reality for everyone through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. et Mac CHOIR SINGS

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CHOIR SINGS be with you, guard you and keep you, now and forever.

Amen. . . .

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