

Christmas Service

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Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 0 0] and yet with that same purpose, united by that same spirit. We thank you, Lord, that you are the God who is everywhere.

And we thank you that your promise is that as your people seek to draw near to you, wherever we are, you will draw near to us. We thank you, Lord, that we have that assurance, not because of ourselves and not because of who we are, not because of how well we have tried to live in the last week.

We know that even our best efforts fall far short. But our confidence, our hope, our security is found in Christ. My hope is found in nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

On Christ the solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand. So, Lord, we thank you for the sure and certain hope that we have in Christ.

We thank you for the way that has been opened for us sinners to come into the presence of the one true and holy God. And we know that Jesus is the only one who is the way.

[1 : 2 0] He is the one who has opened the way for sinners such as we are to come into your presence as those who have been cleansed in the blood of Christ and made pure and made righteous in and through him.

We thank you, Lord, for the paraphrase of Scripture that we have begun to serve us with as we have heard Farrakhar sing and as we have listened and sung within our own hearts.

We thank you for that good news of great joy that went out to all the people, that Christ the Saviour was born. And we praise you, Lord, that at this time of year we have that particular focus.

We look at the coming of Christ into this world, the Messiah, the Promised One. Emmanuel, the one who was and is God with us. Jesus, the Saviour of sinners.

We do thank you that you, Lord Jesus, were willing to come into this world, from the realms of glory, into a world that was broken, into a world that was needing to be saved.

[2 : 3 1] And we thank you, Lord Jesus, that you lived for us that perfect life that we could not live. We thank you that you died in our place, taking from us the sin that weighs us down and giving to us your righteousness which lifts us up.

We thank you that Jesus rose from the grave. We thank you that this is the day that we remember that he is victorious, that he is the resurrected Lord.

And we praise you that there is that sure and certain hope of resurrection for all who believe. So give us, Lord, faith, we pray, as we come before you.

We're conscious this is a busy time of year. Our minds are full of different things. Our days have been busy with many activities.

But we ask, Lord, that for this hour, that you would still our hearts, that you would clear our minds, that you would help us to be still and to know that you are God and that you are with us.

[3 : 45] So meet with us, we pray. Give to us faith. Increase our faith if we are your people. And enable us to be those who are looking to Jesus.

We pray for those who are struggling today. We're always conscious of those who are struggling. We know the struggles of our own hearts also.

We pray for those whose hearts are sore. We continue to pray, Lord, as we must, for those who grieve and who find this time of year to be all the more painful.

We ask, Lord, for your comfort to be their portion. We pray on for those who battle with addictions, some who may even be struggling in a particular way at this precise moment in time.

And as we think upon them, we carry them to you in prayer. And we ask, Lord, that they would know Christ as Saviour and that they would know the strength that God gives, that strength which is able to break the chains of sin and addiction.

[5 : 02] We pray for those, Father, who are sick, who have perhaps received difficult diagnosis in past weeks and months.

And we ask, Lord, that you would draw near to them, that you would lay your hands of healing upon them. And for those, Lord, who may not be healed in this world, we pray that they would know the grace, the saving grace and the sustaining grace of Jesus.

We pray, Father, for those who are struggling with this virus, this pandemic, which has brought such dramatic change into our lives over this last year.

We are conscious of some who we know who are sick and who are struggling with this. We ask, Lord, that you would lay your hands of healing upon them.

We pray that as the vaccine is rolled out, that it would be rolled out quickly and we pray that it would be effective, that our vulnerable people in the islands, especially, that we are part of, would receive that protection that they need at an early stage.

[6 : 19] And we pray, as we hear about this more aggressive strain, Lord, that you would subdue it and we ask, Lord, that those who seek to treat it would be able to do so effectively.

We pray that you would give us patience at a time where we hear of tightening restrictions and when plans change and when disappointment may be felt.

Give us patience and we ask that you would give to those that you've allowed to be in authority over us wisdom, that they would humble themselves and look for the wisdom that comes that comes only from heaven.

And for us as a nation, Lord, we pray that you would turn us back. We would have thought that surely at a time like this when we are so aware of our own mortality that we would turn back to our maker, our saviour, and yet we do not see any any indications of that at the national level.

And so we pray as part of this nation, give to us that gift of repentance. Help us, Lord, to see our sin and our need to turn to Christ the saviour.

[7 : 40] So help us, Lord, we pray. Be with us in our struggles and Lord, we thank you that you are with us not just in the depths, but also in the heights and the high points of life.

We thank you for ENA and Mihaela and Miriam with us this morning. We thank you for ENA and Miriam and Mihaela's marriage on Friday and we ask, Lord, that you would bless them as a family and that they would know and continue to know all the days that you give them, your presence, your peace, and the assurance that you are the God who walks with them.

So hear our prayers. Bless this hour of worship and enable us to know your presence with us for we pray these things in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Boys and girls, we have a few with us today and there are a few more behind that camera.

But something to show you today can you see that there? Can you see that? You can see that, yeah? See that?

[9 : 01] Okay. What am I showing you here? You can talk to me at this point. Lois? Pies. Pies. Pies, yes. Pies. Steak pies?

Minced pies. Iced mince pies, no less. Put your hand up if you like mince pies. You can, the adults can do this too. Who likes mince pies?

John McSween doesn't like mince pies so don't buy any for him. Yeah, I like mince pies, I have to say. And I like these mince pies. These are the ones with the icing on the top.

But I have to say these mince pies are nothing compared to some of the standard of mince pies that I get to taste around here. Katie McCasco, excellent mince pies.

Nanny, excellent mince pies. Joanne Bank, amazing mince pies. This year there's been a shortage, sadly. I believe there's no mince meat to be bought anywhere.

[10 : 05] So I've had to be content with Tesco's mince pies. But, can anyone tell me the answer to this question? Do you know why we eat mince pies at Christmas?

Does anyone know the answer to that question? No? No one at all? Not even Michael behind the screen there.

No? No, well, I didn't know either, to be honest. So I looked it up. I was curious about it. So, I looked it up because I do, I was missing mince pies. And, Good Housekeeping Magazine says this, so it must be true.

It says that in the history of mince pies, little pastries, mini mince pies, were originally made in oval shapes to present the manger baby Jesus slept in.

So mince pies, when they were first made, they didn't come round like this, but they were more oval shaped. And they were, they were like a, a little thing that was tasty, but it also reminded us of the manger where baby Jesus was, was laid.

[11 : 28] And, do you know when mince pies used to be eaten? Because you can't buy mince pies in February or March, can you? You can only buy them at Christmas.

But do you know accurately when mince pies were to be eaten? Anyone know? If you didn't know the answer to the first question, you almost certainly aren't going to have a clue about the second one.

Well, back in the Middle Ages, again, I didn't know this, this is good housekeeping magazine, so it must be true. Back in the Middle Ages, over 500 years ago, and going way back further than that, people used to eat one mince pie a day for 12 days in a row.

They began on Christmas Day, and they eat, they would eat a mince pie a day all the way through for 12 days to what they called 12th night.

And Good Housekeeping magazine says, doing this was believed to bring you happiness for the next 12 months. Well, that sounds like nonsense to me.

[12 : 39] I think mince pies bring you happiness for the two minutes that you have them in your mouth if you like mince pies. But I don't think they bring happiness for the next 12 months.

But here's the question, the bigger question, the more important question. Who is it that can make our hearts happy?

You could say mince pies make our tummies happy for one minute or two minutes, but who is it that can make our hearts happy? who is it that can give us not just happiness, but like a joy that lasts?

Not just for today, not even just for 12 months, but for all of life and then forever. Who is it? John Rory's got his hand up. Jesus can.

Jesus is the one who can give us not just this up and down happiness, but a joy, a steady joy through the happy times and the sad times, through the good times and the bad times.

[13 : 51] Jesus is the one who can give us that lasting joy. Remember what the angel said to the shepherds? The angel said, we're going to look at this in the service, do not be afraid.

I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today, in the time of David, a saviour has been born to you.

He is Christ the Lord. So if you and I want to have joy in our hearts, it doesn't come from eating mince pies.

It comes from trusting Jesus to be our saviour. It comes from asking him to wash away all our sins and coming to live in us forever.

Sometimes we say that, don't we? And we don't take time to really take it in, do we? Because all of us, even if we look back over the last few days, we can think of things that we've said, we can think of things that we've done, things that we wish we hadn't said, things that we wish we hadn't done.

[15 : 11] We can look back over years, and we can think about things that made us feel guilty and heavy, and they weigh us down and they make us sad.

But the promise of God is that if we confess our sin, if we say to God, Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for what I've done.

These things that bother me, these things that keep me up at night, I'm sorry for them. I'm turning away from them, and I want you to wash them away.

Then we have the promise that even if our sins are like a scarlet, dark stain that marks our hearts, then God promises, because of what Jesus did in coming and living and dying for us, our hearts, our lives can be made as white as snow.

So you can walk in to the church this morning with hearts that are dark, lives that feel heavy, and we can walk out feeling and knowing that we have been made clean.

[16 : 28] And that's something that can give us deep joy, knowing our sins are forgiven and God has brought us close to himself. So let's pray about that now.

Lord God, we do thank you for the truth of Christmas. We thank you that although we were and are sinners, God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

We thank you that the blood of Jesus that was shed at the cross is strong enough to wash away every sin that we may remember and feel guilty about.

We thank you, Lord, that you promise that you will purify us from everything that is not right and that you make us right in Jesus. So help us, Lord, we pray.

If there's anyone here this morning or anyone who's listening in who has not yet asked for that forgiveness, we pray that even now, each of us would ask for that forgiveness, that cleansing of our hearts.

[17 : 49] And we pray, Lord Jesus, that you would come in to our hearts, come in to our lives, be our saviour, be our Lord, give us that joy, we pray, which begins in this world in time, but never ends.

And we ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Boys and girls, I think some of you are heading away to Sunday school just now. And as they're heading to Sunday school, we could turn in our Bibles to Luke chapter two, please.

I usually say as the children are heading out, don't just notice how cute they are as they head out, but remember to pray for them.

We're not seeing the children as much these days, you can't even see them as they're heading out because they duck under the camera. but let's remember all the more at this time to be praying for our young ones.

Luke chapter two and we will read from verse one to verse 18.

[19 : 23] Luke chapter two, verse one. This is God's word. In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was the governor of Syria.

And everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up to the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea to Bethlehem the town of David because he belonged to the house on line of David.

He went there to register with Mary who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn son.

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

[20 : 33] Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what they had been told them about this child.

And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds had said to them. Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us.

[21 : 33] Again, let's pray for a moment as we come back to the scripture. Lord God, we ask that we would know your help now, the help of the Holy Spirit as we meditate upon these verses and upon the Christmas story.

May it not be so familiar that it makes no impact on our lives, but we pray that it would make a deep impact on our lives, that it would touch our hearts.

Lord God, we pray that you would be active in this place, amongst the children also next door, and in every other place where Christ born and crucified and risen is preached.

We ask, Lord, that we would know the assurance that you are working for your glory and for the encouragement of your people. So help us, Lord, we pray now as we look to you, and we ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Ever since we can remember, we've known the story of Christmas.

[22 : 42] I don't think there's anyone who is in this room this morning, I doubt there's anyone who's watching in on that screen this morning who doesn't know the story of Christmas. We were told that by our parents and our grandparents perhaps, it's been read to us from when we were tiny in children's Bibles, we heard it in Sunday school.

So it's a familiar story that's been told to us by many different people over the years. And today, what I'd like us to do is listen again to this Christmas story, or to listen to part of the Christmas story as it's told to us by Dr.

Luke. Luke, who wrote Luke's Gospel, and that was a doctor by profession. And what I'd like to do is just listen to how he tells us this Christmas story, or elements of the Christmas story.

And I'd like us to gather our thoughts under four headings as we go through this. The first thing we note is that Christmas was historical. It was historical.

The second thing that we'll see is that Christmas was planned. The third thing we'll see is that Christmas was miraculous, miraculous, and the final thing we'll see is that Christmas was communicative.

[24 : 06] It was God's way of meeting with us and speaking to us. So first of all, we see that Christmas was historical. Look at Luke chapter one.

If you have your Bibles open in front of you today, that'll help. If it had been a normal service, I would have had some of you up here doing these readings. But you're going to have to be content to listen to me read these passages today because we can't have people going back and forth to tables.

So first of all, Luke chapter one and verses one to verse four. Christmas was historical. Luke says, many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who were from the first, just as though they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Now, we read about Theophilus there, and he is the one who's receiving, in the first instance, this letter from Luke, and if you put yourself in the shoes of Theophilus for a moment, as he picks up this account, this piece of writing, and reads the introduction, these opening verses, he would have known right from the very beginning, this was not a piece of creative writing that he'd been handed, this was not some bedtime story, this was not some work of poetry, or allegory, or mythology, this is something that reads like a journalist's article, or this is something that reads perhaps like a medical record, because as Luke presents this, he is presenting this as something that is factual, it's factual, it's an account of things that really happened, that seemed to have been fulfilled, things that had been anticipated, and were now fulfilled.

[26 : 33] Luke, verse 2, he has eyewitnesses that he's going to interview within this gospel, verse 2, he has, verse 2 again, servants of the word who will speak, so Luke is making clear to us, as he was to Theophilus, that he has not used his imagination, in coming up with this gospel.

He's actually performed, verse 3, a careful investigation, and he presents it to Theophilus, who was a real person, the commentators think Theophilus was likely a Roman official, who had also come to faith, he was a believer, Theophilus means one who loves God, and so Luke writes this, he hands it to Theophilus, so that Theophilus will know the certainty of the things that he has been taught, he hands this to Theophilus, so that Theophilus will know the historicity of the fact, that Jesus came into this world, and lived, and died, and rose, for our salvation.

So as we begin with the birth of Jesus, in Luke's gospel, we see here that Luke is presenting this as history, and you might say, well, of course he's presenting this as history, Luke's a Christian doctor, he's a Christian, he's going to present this as history, but then there are non-Christian historians that you can go and look up in your own time, people like Josephus, people like Tacitus, people like Pliny the Younger, and they will all as non-Christian historians, back up the historicity of the birth and the life of Jesus.

So this is the first thing I think we need to note. There may be some things about Christmas which are make-believe, but this is not.

The real Christmas message is historical. So that's the first point. Christmas was historical. The second point to note here is that Christmas was planned.

[29 : 14] Christmas was very carefully planned. Now at the moment, in the UK, there's a degree of outrage, because it looks like this Christmas is not going to go according to the plans that we may have made.

But the first Christmas was carefully planned, and it came to pass exactly as God had planned it. And already there's been a hint towards this, because Luke writes in verse 1 about the things that have been fulfilled among us.

And so he's referring to things which were prophesied in the Old Testament, and now were fulfilled in and through Jesus. The birth of the Messiah was something that was foretold through the Old Testament.

We could go all over the Old Testament to see that. And now, as we see this account in Luke chapter 1, the birth of the Messiah, which had been so long anticipated, was foretold again to Mary.

God's plan to send the Savior and to send him very soon was shared with Mary. So if you look now at Luke chapter 1 and at verse 26.

[30 : 37] Luke chapter 1 and verse 26. The birth of Jesus foretold. In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledge to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David.

The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, Greetings, you who are highly favoured, the Lord is with you. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

But the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

He will be great and will be called the son of the most high. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

His kingdom will never end. God will be And even in that small section, these few verses, we have a lot of Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled.

[31 : 48] Think of Isaiah chapter 7 and verse 14 that we hear being read out every Christmas. We'll hear it being read out again tonight. This was a message that was given to Isaiah that went through Isaiah to the house, to the descendants of David.

It says in Isaiah 7, 14, Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign, the virgin will be with child, and will give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel.

That was the prophecy. and we see that prophecy fulfilled in and through the birth of Jesus 600 years later, which makes clear to us that the birth of Jesus was planned.

Mary may not have known that, but God knew it, the birth of Jesus the Savior was planned. And then we read in verse 33 of Luke 1 about this eternal reign, about this never-ending kingdom of the Messiah.

And again, that's a prophecy that was being fulfilled. It can be traced back to Daniel 7. It can be traced back to Psalm 45. I haven't got time to go there today.

[33 : 18] But again, these promises were fulfilled in and through Jesus, which shows us that the birth of Christ, hundreds of years in advance, was planned.

That plan was shared. And it goes back even further than that. In the birth of Jesus, we see the promise that we have in Genesis chapter 3 and verse 15 fulfilled.

There would be a Savior. He would come from the seed of the woman. And he would crush the head of Satan. And here, as Mary receives this news, we see that the Savior who would crush the head of Satan was born.

and the point I'm trying to make is that although the birth of Jesus clearly happened in history, it didn't just happen.

It was planned. in fact, from before time began even, as God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit saw us, a people fallen into sin with the need of a Savior, the coming of Jesus, the birth of Jesus, Christmas.

[34 : 54] It was planned. So, Christmas was historical, really happened.

Christmas, secondly, was planned, carefully planned, within the Trinity before time began. And then that plan was shared as time went on.

The third thing we see here is that Christmas was miraculous. Christmas was miraculous. And we see that as we continue looking at this conversation between Mary and the angel.

Mary, when she receives this message from the angel, she understandably has questions. If you put yourself in her shoes, you're going to have questions. And she has questions because what was happening to her, that the angel is sharing with her, it wasn't natural.

Yes, she was engaged to Joseph, but there had been no physical intimacy with Joseph, so what was happening to her was supernatural, it was miraculous, it was impossible.

[36 : 06] And we hear that in verse 34 to 38 of Luke chapter 1 as we just continue through this conversation. So the angel has shared the news with Mary, foretelling the birth of Jesus.

And Mary's response in verse 34 is to say, how will this be? Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin. The angel answered, the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.

For nothing is impossible with God. I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May it be to me as you have said.

Then the angel left her. And at that point, we kind of expect Dr. Luke, who's writing this, to take a little break and to give us a word of explanation.

[37 : 21] We almost expect Dr. Luke to provide some kind of rational explanation for this thing that has been just shared. We expect maybe some medical term to be given to us to explain this away.

But Dr. Luke says nothing. Dr. Luke seems to have absolutely no problem in accepting that the virgin birth, impossible as it was, was a miracle.

He makes no attempt to explain it away. He makes no attempt to go into the science of how this may have happened. He simply leaves this out there as something which is clearly impossible is a miracle.

And Mary as scared as she was, she didn't doubt that God could do miracles. She didn't doubt that in respect of her and her relative Elizabeth, nothing was impossible for God.

So Mary's response to what she's told is an excellent response. She simply says, I am the Lord's servant. I don't demand to know the science of this.

[38 : 47] I don't demand to have an explanation of this. I simply bow before you as your servant. And I think in application here we can learn both from Dr. Luke and from Mary.

I think we need to have this same kind of readiness to recognize that the God that we come before in the Bible is much bigger than our small minds.

He's the God who made the laws of nature, but he's the God who is not bound by the laws of nature. He is not confined to the perimeters of our rational understanding.

And if you think he is, then I would say with J.B. Phillips in that book of the 1970s, your God is too small. Christmas was miraculous.

Christmas was planned. Christmas was historical. And finally here, Christmas was communicative. was God's way of sharing a message with the world that he so loved.

[40 : 09] And Christmas is a time that still is very much communicative. We tend to be more communicative with each other at Christmas than we are perhaps at other times in the year.

People that we haven't spoken to for a while, we pick up the phone and we have a chat with. people that we don't see or hear of from one end of the year to the other, we receive a card and we send a card to.

Or we might even send a text just to pass on some greetings at Christmas time. You know that the first ever text message that was sent, there's a question for Hughes trivia quizzes, the first text message that was ever sent, was sent on December 25th, 1992 and it simply said Merry Christmas.

It's a little known fact. But we're not here to study that text message, we're looking here at the text of the first Christmas message. So flick from chapter one to chapter two of Luke's gospel and we'll take just a final look look at the message that's passed to the shepherds.

Luke chapter two and at verse eight to verse 18. And I'm not going to read the whole section because we read it before the sermon began. But we'll just read the first couple of verses.

[41 : 44] There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. And the angel of the Lord appeared to them. The glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified. But the angel said to them, do not be afraid.

I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people today in the town of David. A saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.

And so it goes on. And we have this message that the shepherds are the first ones to receive.

So just to finish, I want to ask three very brief questions. First of all, as we look at this message to the shepherds, who is the message from?

And it's perhaps an obvious question, and what follows is an obvious answer, that the message is from God, it's from the Lord. Verse 9 says, And the angels in scripture, they were simply messengers.

[42 : 56] We have this idea of angels with wings fluttering around in white suits. That's not what we find in scripture. The angels often were very ordinary looking.

Sometimes they weren't. Sometimes they had a heavenly glow about them. But the main purpose that an angel had was to take messages from heaven to earth. And in this case, we see something of heaven's glory shining around them because of where they had come from and the essence of the message that they brought.

But the thing that we see here is that the author, the one who spoke this message, was God. I was speaking to Don Watterson, Scott Road, just a couple of weeks back.

And he was showing me a message that he received from the Queen. We got all kinds of junk mail through the post. This was not junk mail.

He opened up this box. There was a book in it and there was various bits and pieces in it. And there was a special message from the Queen to himself thanking him.

[44 : 11] For all that he did to bring peace to the nation as a surviving veteran, as someone who gave such service during the war years.

Because of who the message came from and what it said, it was a message of great importance and great value to Donald, rightly so. And this message of Christmas, the message of Jesus' birth, it was a message from the King of Heaven and Earth to these shepherds, telling them about the promise of peace that was coming through the Saviour.

To who was the message from? It was from God. Second question, almost there, who was the message for? And we're told in verse 10, it was a message for all the people.

Not some of the people, not just a select few, but it was a message for all the people, and it was a message even for the shepherds. The message was delivered first to the shepherds, and I love the idea of this amazing message being delivered to such unlikely people.

We have the idea in our minds of shepherds being very respectable, kindly old crofters, but back in this day, shepherds were disreputable, they were what one commentator called the despised class.

[45 : 48] They could not give testimony in court because their word was held not to be reliable. They were thieves, they were sheep thieves. They were nice characters.

The Jesus Storybook Bible, Sally Lloyd Jones, is not a technical commentary, but it gives the message of how shepherds were regarded. She says in children's language, in those days people thought shepherds were nobody's, just scruffy old riffraff.

But God must have thought shepherds were very important indeed because they're the ones he chose to tell the good news to first. And I think in giving this message to the shepherds, God was making clear that this was a message for all the people.

Everyone. No one was excluded. No one was too good for this message. No one was too bad to receive this message.

This was a message for everyone, for all the people. This is a message. It remains a message for everyone.

[47 : 02] We keep getting messages from Boris Johnson and Nicola Sturgeon. This is a message for them. The message of Christ.

It's a message for Donald Trump. It's a message for Joe Biden. It's a message for Kim Jong-un. It's a message for Prince William and Kate. It's a message for Richard Dawkins and Brian Cox.

It's a message for Harry Styles and David Beckham and everyone. It's a message for you. It's a message for me.

It's a message for all the people. The gospel invitation, the good news about Jesus Christ, his birth, his death, his resurrection is a message from God for all the people.

There are no caveats, there are no disqualifications, there are no exclusions, there is no small print. This is a message from God for all the people.

[48 : 08] And the final thing I want to look at here is what did God say? This communication, this message was from God, it was for all the people.

And what does God say? Well, the opening words the shepherds heard in verse 10 were these words, do not be afraid.

Do not be afraid. That's what they heard. And time after time in the Bible, God says this, do not be afraid.

I think it's 49 times in the Old Testament, same phrase exactly as used, do not be afraid. 16 times, Jesus himself says this, do not be afraid.

And so the substance of this message from heaven to earth is a message where we need not be afraid of the God who loves us and who wants to save us.

[49 : 25] There is a right fear of God, there is a reverence of God, there is a respect that God should be shown, but that right fear of God should cause us to come to him and not run from him.

And the shepherds who were so aware of their sin, probably their first instinct was to run as far away as they could. And so God comes to him and he says to them, do not be afraid, listen to me.

And then he gives them this message of the saviour, the God-man who was born for them.

Did you notice that as we were reading through the text? It says in verse 11, today in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you.

When we get the message of a baby boy or girl being born, they've been born to the parents. The shepherds hear this message from God, this saviour, he has been born to you.

[50 : 55] He's your saviour. He's come to be your Lord. He's come to be the one who can save you and I from our sin.

So do not be afraid of him, is what they heard. And do not be afraid of him, is what we are hearing.

His name is Emmanuel, God with us, not God against us. And so much was this God with us that he was willing not only to come to the manger, to the cradle, but to go from the cradle to the cross, to pay for the sins of the shepherds and the sins of us and the sins of all the people.

So the shepherds, having heard this communication, having received this message, they understood good, this was a message of good news, of great joy.

And so they hurried off to see Jesus. And having seen him, they believed in him.

[52 : 27] And having believed in him, they shared this message of Christmas. The shepherds challenge us as we close, don't they?

As we see their readiness to believe, as we see their eagerness to go and share this good news. so as we think about them, let's ask the question of us.

Do we believe in the historical, supernatural, planned birth of Jesus?

Do we understand that this message from heaven to earth earth is good news? And are we able to say with the shepherds, this is good news for me?

Because this Jesus, he is my Savior. He's the one who's given me, a sinner, peace with God, and lasting joy, not minced by happiness.

[53 : 50] but lasting joy, which begins today, but knows no end. Maybe we have the faith of these shepherds.

Let's close with prayer. Our heavenly father, we thank you for the message of Christmas. It's a message that's familiar to us, but we pray that we would not be so familiar with this message that we would overlook the wonder of it all, the wonder of the God of heaven, sending news and being himself the good news, whereby we who are sinners can be those who are saved through Christ.

give us the faith of the shepherds, we pray, to believe and to share the good news of Jesus. And we ask these things in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen. Farrakhan will now lead us as we sing, as he sings, closing psalm, four verses of psalm 98.

O sing a new song to the Lord, for wonders he hath done, his right hand and his holy arm, him victory hath won, the Lord God, his salvation has caused to be known, his justice in the heathen sight, he openly hath shown, he mindful of his grace and truth, to Israel's house hath been, and the salvation of our God, all the ends of the earth have seen, let all the earth unto the Lord send forth a joyful noise, lift up your voice aloud to him, we'll have to do that in our hearts, sing praises and rejoice.

[55 : 58] O sing a new song to the Lord, for wonders he hath done, his right hand and his holy arm, him victory hath won, the Lord God, to take the thy marriage through his justice in the heathen sight, he openly hath shown he mindful of his grace and truth to Israel's house hath been and the salvation of our

God all ends of the earth have sin let all the earth unto the Lord send forth the joyful noise lift up your voice aloud to him sing praises and rejoice we'll stand now for the benediction and I may the grace of our Lord

Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all both now and forevermore amen