

Sermon: Unwrapping Christmas

Reading: Luke 2:1-14



Happy Christmas.

The season of Christmas has begun and it lasts 12 days, however I think that's something many parents will not want their children finding out! Some things you do need to remind the children however apart from tidying their room or placing their PE kit in the wash is the real reason for Christmas. It's not just the children that need to be reminded about Christmas (not their PE kits), but adults as well. And what a wonderful life Jesus is to speak of!

There are so many events we consider with Christmas, apart from the presents and secular imagery. Biblically speaking Christmas includes.....

Elizabeth's pregnancy in her old age and her husband Zechariah dumbstruck!

The Angel Gabriel's visit to Mary telling her she is highly favoured and will also give birth

The shepherds who heard the angelic choir the night Jesus was born

The manger for a Kings bed

The wise men travelling afar, not so much following a star as the carol depicts!

Then there are the nasty bits, Herod's jealousy and evil intent to rid the world of the King

Mary and Joseph fleeing to Egypt with their young child

These events are all part of the real Christmas. I find it amusing just how early the secular season of Christmas begins each year, but did you know Christmas actually begins much further back than the secular September/October!!?

Christmas begins much further back in history, actually all the way back to the book of Genesis, in a beautiful garden. In this garden a mother of all prophecies was given which sends a crimson thread running all the way through Scriptures through every book until we reach the gospels.

Context

In our reading today we discover Caesar Augustus has issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world which means each person has to return to their ancestral home in order to be registered.

This is what brought young Mary, still a teenager, all the way from Nazareth which is about 80-100 miles away to Bethlehem where she gave birth. Many scholars when looking through the prophecies were puzzled as to how the virgin would live in Nazareth and come to have her child in Bethlehem and then be in Egypt as foretold in the prophets. What would make someone do that? Then we read, 'Caesar Augustus issued the decree' and Herod's anger and jealousy to kill the innocents hoping to murder the new born King.

Just as a child is eager to rip off the wrappings from their presents, let us do the same as we journey together through the Scriptures as we retell the true Christmas story, and so unwrap Christmas from its many coverings.

Christmas unwrapped

Back in the garden of Eden, Adam rebelled against God, when Eve was deceived by Satan's cunning temptation. A curse was pronounced that there would be strife and hardships in the world from that day forth. Life became a daily grind and toil to survive and death was mans end result.

The world found itself changed under this curse brought about by Satan's cunning temptation and Adam's fall. Darkness now covered the world. The relationship with God was broken and mankind no longer heard God walking join the garden and conversing with Adam and Eve as He had so often done before.

The curse had to be broken which bound mankind in spiritual darkness but what man could break such a curse? Who could take a curse of the whole world upon themselves and live - the answer is nobody could.

God however promised, He would send one who would be the saviour and would be able to break this curse and free mankind. **(Gen 3:15) fulfilled in (Matt1:20/Gal 4:4).**

Until then the world was filled with grief, wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilences and diseases. Oh how the world groaned under the curse and mankind wept bitterly at all of their toil and hardships as evil and oppression increases and seems to have no end of its appetite for misery.

When we read the book of Isaiah, a prophet of God we begin to see God's plan unfolding and a ray of light now shining offering hope that God was going to keep His promise. Isaiah was told about a young girl, a virgin will be chosen to carry a very special child. **(Isa 7:14) fulfilled in (Matt 2:1/Luke 2:4-6)**

Micah the prophet was told the child will be born in Bethlehem **(Mic 5:2) fulfilled in (Matt2:1/Luke 4:6).**

This child is special, He will have royal blood line **(2 Sam 7:12-13/Isa 9:7) fulfilled in (Luke 1:32-33/Rom 1:3)** but this is not what makes Him so amazing

Jeremiah speaks of a massacre of children which will take place where this child will be born and Hosea shares, this child will flee from Bethlehem to Egypt **(Jer 31:15 / Hos11:1) fulfilled in (Matt 2:14-15).**

When the time was right God would send a messenger ahead who will prepare the way for this Messiah, God's promise curse bearer. Although He will heal many and feed thousands, teaching people the ways of God, His own people will reject Him **(Ps 69:8 / Isa 53:3 / Isa 40:3-5) fulfilled in (Luke 3:3-6/ John 7:5)**

This child identity will finally be revealed as the Son of God. Isaiah was told He will be called Immanuel which means God is with us. The angels gave Him the name Jesus which means, Saviour, or He saves His people. His life was filled with miracles, He healed those who came to Him, He fed the hungry, He calmed storms and even the waves obeyed Him. This is what makes Him so special. He proves He is God by living a life without sin. He is perfect. **(Ps 2:7) fulfilled (Matt 3:16-17)**

The world so spiritually blind and living in darkness couldn't stand Jesus. Plots were made against Him and conspirators stood against Him to rid the world of the One for whom the world was created through and for.

The Son of God was falsely accused, betrayed and sold for 30 pieces of silver by a close friend who broke bread with Him. **(Ps 41:9 / Zech 11:12-13)** fulfilled in **(Luke 22:47-49 / Matt 26:14-16)**.

The Son of God was crucified between two criminals, having His hands and feet pierced, while soldiers gambled for His clothes. **(Isa 53:12 / Ps 22:7-8; 16; 22 / Zech 12:10)** fulfilled in **(John 20:25-27 / Matt 27:35-36)**.

Soldiers would pierce His side to make sure death had come and afterwards He would be buried in a rich man's tomb which was borrowed **(Zech 12:10 / Isa 53:9)** fulfilled in **(Matt 27:57-60)**.

The baby who was born this day, into a small town called Bethlehem, the one who laid His royal head in a manger of straw, is unlike any child ever born as this child is the Son of God. God was the only person who could break the curse that was held over the world. This is what makes Christmas so special, for Jesus' birth marks the dawn of death's destruction and the setting free of the chains which bound people in their sins and spiritual darkness. The rift between mankind and God will be healed through this amazing person, born this Christmas morn.

Only a perfect man to break its curse. God was prepared to give up His only Son's life in order to set mankind free. For Jesus became the curse for us so that His righteousness could be passed on to us. In this exchange we became the righteousness of God. As Jesus is perfect, sinless, spotless, He washes us clean, renews a right Spirit within us and gives us the right to become children of God, through repentance and faith. Jesus' great gift to the world, this is why we give presents, His gift of grace offers us the gift of eternal life.

The night Jesus was born the shepherds on the hillside saw the curtain of heaven being pulled aside as the Angels looked on and marvelled that the Son of God was prepared to step into His creation and become flesh (Incarnation) in order to offer His life as a substitute, a ransom for ours to break sin's curse.

As Jesus gave up His life, He took up His life again in a glorious resurrection rising from the grave showing He had broken sin's curse of death and death no longer had a grip on mankind's eternal souls as Jesus broke the curse which was spoken off way back in the Garden in Eden. We know Christmas is true because of what took place at Easter. The tomb was empty after the Third Day as Jesus promised it would be and hundreds saw Him over 40 days and thousands upon thousands have testified to Him ever since. Christmas and Easter are so special.

Summary

There is still one more promise to be fulfilled - that this same Jesus will return again as King and rule this world with glory. This is the Christian hope. Although Christmas may feel different this year, remember traditions change but Jesus Christ does not and neither does His eternal gospel message. This is what makes it so special, God came down and revealed His glory to us, that we should not fear, but trust in Him through all that Jesus has done for us. Now when we understand that, Christmas can never be the same again.