

Paper Crowns

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[0 : 00] It is so fantastic to see you all this evening, even though I can't physically see you because it's so dark in here. It's such a great joy to be together this evening.

Can you believe that there are only five days now until Christmas Day? Put your hands up, and I think I'll see them. Put your hands up if you're all set. A few of us.

Put your hands up if the 24-7 ASDA, you'll be there at 11.55 on Thursday evening. A few of us. It's good. Well, I wonder if you've ever thought about the strange things that we seem to do on Christmas Day.

I know in our family, growing up, I've got two brothers. Christmas Day, we would do things that we would do on no other day of the year. For example, on Christmas Day, it became acceptable to wear pajamas until about 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

Is that just me and our brothers? Does anyone else do that? 2 o'clock in the afternoon? It also became acceptable, even though my dad was a dentist, to eat chocolate for breakfast, to eat sweets for breakfast, and to wash it all down with half a glass of iron brew.

[1 : 13] Anyone else? Just me. Just me. On Christmas Day, another thing we used to do, you'll be like me in this one. Even though no one had paid attention to them all year, Brussels sprouts became an acceptable form of vegetable to have on your plate at lunchtime.

Is that fair enough? It's interesting, isn't it? We have that joke about whether turkeys would vote for Christmas. Well, I think Brussels sprouts would definitely vote for Christmas, for it's the only day of the year that they actually get a look in.

Brussels sprouts for Christmas Day. Well, I thought this evening we would embrace one of my personal favorites of strange things that we do on Christmas Day. So, if you look in front of you, and if you look behind you, you'll find your Christmas hat.

I thought it would be great if we could all wear our Christmas hats. Good. We're getting into this. Excellent. There's plenty more dotting around.

I think I bought 200 of them. So, I think we should be all okay. It's interesting, isn't it? As a nation, on Christmas Day, all of a sudden it becomes acceptable to wear one of these strange hats on your head.

[2 : 27] Does anyone else think that is strange? Maybe there's a birthday occasion where you wear a hat, maybe for an hour or so, but from the minute you pull that cracker to the minute you go to sleep at night, you have to wear this Christmas hat.

And if you take it off for a second, then you're called a Scrooge. I find the Christmas hat thing really strange. But I got thinking on it this week, and I want to suggest to us that we want to massively embrace the Christmas hat on Christmas Day.

And here's why. Because I think this is a fantastic way of remembering what Christmas Day is all about. For it's a hat, but it's not really a hat, is it?

It's a crown. And it's not a gold crown. It's not a worldly crown like our kings would wear. It's a paper crown. It's a different crown. And it's amazing to think that Christmas is all about the coming of a different kind of king.

So what I want us to do just in a short time now is just to revisit those verses in Luke chapter 1. And I want us to see what the angel says to the shepherds about this king who is to be born.

[3 : 41] I'm going to go on the screen. Let's read again just what the angel says to the shepherds from verse 8. 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 that will cause

great joy for all the people.

Today in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger.

So just two things I want us to see about this different kind of king. Two things. Firstly, the angel tells the shepherds that this king will have a different kind of birth.

For notice the people that the angel is sent to. Who has God chosen as the first humans to hear this wonderful news?

[4 : 48] What fine specimens? What upstanding members of society has God personally targeted as the ones who will have that great privilege of the first ones to hear this news?

Well, shepherds. Now, we have to say that's a bit surprising. Shepherds. Shepherds. Not so much men of influence, but men of isolation.

Shepherding in the day was a job considered to be for those at the very bottom of society. This is a profession that you don't want your careers advisor at school to tell you you should be entering into. This is a job that carries with it a nasty stigma. Now, for shepherds were known for being notorious. Now, we have that carol, don't we, at this time of year that says, if I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.

Well, if I was a shepherd, I'd steal a lamb is probably more closer to the truth. These guys are notorious. In fact, they're so notorious that a shepherd's witness was not permissible in court.

[5 : 52] Now, probably because they were the ones who were being taken to court. These are not guys that come off well in society. But it's to these insignificant and notorious outsiders that the angel goes to, and they're the first people to hear this good news.

You see, this is a different kind of king that we're dealing with here. And if the people are surprising, then we have to say that the place of the birth is even more surprising. This king, God's king, the setting for his birth, well, it's not the Sheraton suite.

It's the stable suite. It's the manger. Not wrapped in finest cotton, but in frailest and dirty cloth. This king will be born not into luxury, but this king will be born into poverty.

We can't help but notice that there's something incredibly simple, is there not, about this birth.

There's no royal procession. There's no Bethlehem brass bands playing them in.

There's no swagger. There's no grandeur. And yet, here is the most significant birth ever to have happened in human history. And why?

[7 : 08] Well, notice who this message is for. Verse 10. It's for all people. Not a token gesture. Not a throwaway line. This message really is for all people.

For rich and for poor. For good and for bad. For insiders and for outsiders. For the religious and for the non-religious. For the prince and for the pauper.

For the king. This message really is for all the people. Because this is a different kind of king that we're dealing with here. And if he's a king that's marked by a different birth, well, the angel also tells the shepherds that he will be a king that will be marked by a different death.

For notice the purpose of the coming of this child. Who is he? Well, verse 11. This child is the saviour. I always find it interesting that the shepherds, sorry, the angel leads with that.

Before the shepherds, you notice that? Before they learn that this good news centres around a child, they learn that this good news centres around a saviour. For this is the theme that will dominate the life of this baby boy.

[8 : 26] This is the identity of the manger dweller. This God child is the long promised, the long expected Messiah. The anointed one who has come to save, who has come to deliver his people.

This God child has come to be the one who will smash, who will obliterate the sin barrier that has separated man and God. Now who's he going to do that?

Well, God in the crib would grow up and go on to become God on the cross. As the child Jesus becomes the man Jesus.

And dies our death. Dies in our place at Calvary. As this innocent man. As this God in the beginning.

Takes the punishment that our sin deserved. And takes it on himself. As Jesus gives us his perfect life. As he opens up the way for us to come and be reconciled to God the Father.

[9 : 36] To be reconciled to our creator. You see friends, the good news of Christmas is the giving of God himself. You see, that's why the angels tell the shepherds that this is good news.

This is good news. This is not in other news. This is not noteworthy news. This is history altering, grace revealing, hope defining, life giving news on a scale that changes absolutely everything. That God would give his only son. That we might not perish. But that we might believe in him. And have eternal life. That is incredible. You see, the true light of the world has come. This is what we're doing at Christmas. The true light of the world has come.

And it's unbelievable news. And so my question as we finish this evening. What kind of news is what kind of news is it to you?

[10 : 44] You see, the invitation at Christmas is for us to come out of the darkness. To step out of this world of darkness.

And come to the one who is the true light and life giver. To come and be reconciled to the God who created us and who so amazingly loves us.

So let me encourage you to embrace the crown this year. See, Christmas is celebrating the coming of a different kind of king.

So let's finish with the lyrics of that great Christmas carol. Come thou long expected Jesus. Let me just read them to you. The carol goes like this.

Born thy people to deliver. Born a child and yet a king. Born to reign in us forever. Now thy gracious kingdom bring. By thine own eternal spirit.

[11 : 43] Rule in all our hearts alone. By thine all sufficient merit. Raise us to thy glorious throne. Why don't we just take a minute. And let's just be silent as we think about some of the things we've been reading and singing tonight.

And just before Esther comes and reads that final reading for us. Let's pray together. Father, we're so thankful for our time together this evening. As we remember.

And as we rejoice. And as we celebrate the coming of the light off to the world. Into our world of darkness. Thank you, Father God, that you would go to such lengths.

Sending your own son to come and rescue us from our darkness. Father God, we ask that you would help us to be those who embrace him. Who love him.

Who adore him this Christmas time, we ask. In Jesus' all-worthy and all-conquering name. Amen.