

# Gloria in Excelsis Deo

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, folks. Well, I didn't know you could get a dry mouth, but sweaty hands at the same time. I've also had to quickly modify this after this quiz.

I don't think I would have got it right either with some of the questions. How are we all this morning? Good. I wonder what your favourite Christmas carol or song is this year.

A few years ago, there was a song that came out. You might remember it. It was called Hope Christmas Gets You to Me. I don't know if you remember it. It was sung by a chap in Glasgow. And it's a song that produces a warm, fuzzy feeling inside of you. There's a line in it that goes like this. I couldn't care what's under the tree. I don't know what I'm getting for Christmas.

But I hope it gets you to me. This was a song that was written at the end of the first COVID year, when we were all fed up of not being able to see each other.

[ 1 : 06 ] But I wonder what your favourite is this year. I wonder, is it the melody or the tune? Is it the words that speak to you? Because of what's going on in your life right now.

Each one of us will find a different Christmas song that speaks to us for some reason. And in fact, actually, I was smiling this morning because these hymns were written for this message this morning.

But Christmas songs will speak to us because of the circumstances that we're going through. Or just because the tunes are new and catchy. Each year, the BBC announces the official Christmas number one.

It's the track that tops the UK singles chart the Friday before Christmas. And it's announced, in fact, it'll be announced today on Radio 1 at 4pm.

So, maybe tonight, in fact, there's probably a lot of people already doing this this morning, but maybe tonight or maybe tomorrow you will be driving home for Christmas.

[ 2 : 11 ] Back to family or to get away. And maybe you've already got that playlist primed. Well, in our passage today, there are three long journeys, but there's only one song.

I don't know if any of you have got kids. There's lots of kids here today. It's actually quite good to see all the kids here. But sometimes kids like to hear the same song played over and over and over again. And I, well, I don't know what that's like yet.

But there's one song in our passage this morning, but yet there's three long journeys. We've also sung this song, and I was pleased that we sang it again this morning. We've also sung this song in Brunfield, a sing with the song of Emmanuel.

And that's probably my favourite Christmas song this year. One, because it's new. Two, because it is full of truth and it communicates some of the things that we've been thinking about here at Brunfield.

Whatever song you've been enjoying over the past month, I hope you've also been enjoying the songs that we have been thinking about as we've been looking at Luke's Gospel. Mary's song, My Soul Magnifies the Lord.

[ 3 : 22 ] Or Zechariah's song, Blessed Be the Lord God of Israel. Both of these songs are pregnant with the truth and meaning and with worship.

And we can see in the language that they were waiting to be brought forth. Well, today I want to think about another song, and it is the angel's song.

Gloria in excelsis Deo. Glory to God in the highest. Now, this account that we have in Luke chapter 2 is a wonderful story about the Lord Jesus entering into time.

The story of his birth is not even the beginning of the story, and it's not the end of the story. In fact, it's right in the middle of the story. It's the heart of the story.

It's the centre point of all of history. God, who is outside of time and a space and matter, comes right into the centre of it all.

[ 4 : 24 ] Even our calendars today remind us of the fact that we count history from the moment that Jesus entered the world. Before Christ and after Christ.

And even if you're an atheist and you don't use these terms, you might use terms like before the common era and the common era. Well, it still points back to this point in history when Jesus was in the world.

Jesus is not a one-hit wonder. And neither are the songs that we've been considering over the last few weeks. They are really the Christmas number one. Week after week after week after week after week after week and for eternity.

We see in our text that the shepherds came and they saw and they returned. Overflowing in the worship of God. And the angels came praising and worshipping God.

Mary. Zechariah. And for us, as Christians, we never tire of singing praise and worship to God about his son. Well, I know that this passage today is very well known.

[ 5 : 35 ] And often with passages that are very well known, there's a tendency just to switch off. But I just want to ask you today just to bear with me for a few minutes as we remind ourselves of the wonder of this account in Luke chapter 2.

Luke reminds us in the opening verses of this chapter. In fact, in chapter 1. That he has set out an orderly account of these things for Theophilus.

And then also for us as readers. That we may have certainty about the things that we have heard. He detailed that Caesar Augustus was ruling.

And that the registration was taking place at the time of or in preparation for Quirinius, who was going to be the governor over Syria. If anybody's studied that in detail, then you'll realize that there might be some slight timeline that we can't quite line up.

But Luke records this so that we can have certainty that these things took place. I think it's important for us to affirm what we know about the birth of Jesus, even by its historical narrative at the time.

[ 6 : 47 ] The story is not a once upon a time fairy tale in Bethlehem. It's anchored in place and time in history.

And Luke sets this out for us. Now, I wasn't much of a studier. I'm still not. And when I started to look at this, some of the things that you studied at school.

Some of the poems and the text that you have studied. Some of the names and the occurrences come flooding back. But Caesar Augustus, I don't know if you remember this, was the adopted son of Julius Caesar.

When Julius Caesar was murdered, the empire was split and controlled by three men. One of them was Caesar Augustus.

And wars and trouble and famine echoed right across the whole of the Mediterranean for years and years until two of these individuals pushed out the third.

[ 7 : 49 ] And then Caesar Augustus defeated his opponents in a remarkable way. And he made his mark on the landscape. For that whole Mediterranean basin there, he changed it in a very remarkable way.

First of all, he brought about peace for the whole region. And that was mainly because he had defeated his rivals. If you haven't got anybody to fight with, then you have peace.

Secondly, he brought a political and administrative skill. Some would even say political and administrative brilliance, which propelled the Roman Empire.

And thirdly, he brought vast sums of money from Egypt to pay the soldiers and to help that Roman economy. He then declared, as we've read in verse 1, he decreed that all should be organized.

They should be registered. They should be taxed. And although that we read a many different census in the Roman Empire, it's believed that the records of the censuses that were taking place were still available hundreds of years later to verify this account that Luke records and the account that we've come to believe.

[ 9 : 02 ] The fact that a baby boy was born in Bethlehem is not really that hard for us to accept. But although Caesar Augustus might have been ruling, God was in charge.

We as mankind, we like to think that we're in charge. But as Christians, we soon come to realize that God is in control. And that he orchestrated the time for Mary to be ready to have her firstborn

while they were in Bethlehem being registered under Caesar Augustus.

I think it's important for us to notice this because this is the fulfillment of the prophecy that we read about in Micah chapter 5, where it says, Jesus being born in Bethlehem is not a random chance. God promised that the Savior would be human, that our Savior would be a Jew, that he would be from the tribe of Judah, he would be from the family of David, he would be born of a virgin, and in Bethlehem, the city of David.

And so you see, for all of these things to come together at that time is not a coincidence. There's a reason and a purpose that Jesus was born at that time, and in that place, and in that way.

[10:37] Now, I mentioned in our text that there are three, and you'll maybe see this if you've still got your passage open, but don't worry if you have not. In our text, there are three long journeys. The first journey we can mark is the journey of Mary and Joseph.

A journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, probably quite a difficult trip. Somewhere between 70 and 80 miles, with a pregnant wife, and I guess probably a fairly busy route, as everyone else would have been moving about to register themselves, so that God's plan would be fulfilled.

We don't really know how far in advance that they travelled, or if the census had taken place, or if they had remained in Bethlehem afterwards, but the Bible says that while they were there, the time came.

And as I've been reading this passage in Luke, and as we've been working through chapter 1 and chapter 2, I really enjoyed this next sentence that Luke records for us. And it says this, And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

I want you to notice the simplicity in the way that this is recorded. It's probably one of the greatest events ever in the history of all time.

[12:07] And yet it's just detailed in three simple phrases. She brought forth her son, wrapped him in swaddling bands, and laid him in a manger.

I really enjoyed the fact that there is something simple, and straightforward, and understated in that. Jesus was born into poverty, and also he was born into an outside place.

The creator, the maker, the sustainer, enters the world as a baby in humility, in dignity, and poverty. The expectation was that the Messiah would become as a mighty hero, as a conquering king, and as a strong warrior, most likely bursting onto the stage with noise and fanfare.

But instead, we find the promised saviour coming into this world in the weakness of a baby. We just sung, maker of Mary, now Mary's child. Now I can't imagine, for those of you who don't know, Rachel, my wife, is expecting, but I can't imagine that Rachel would like our firstborn to be placed in a stone feeding trough, or in a stable, or a cave.

But Jesus was. And it's interesting, if you like to study, you could do a little study into this feeding trough, have a look at what happened during the Passover when they would select a lamb and they would take care of it.

[13:47] Well, it suggested that the lamb was kept safe and clean by placing them into the same kind of manger. Which is, if that is true, then it would be a beautiful picture of the lamb of God lying in a manger like the lamb, the Passover lamb.

I haven't done a huge amount of study. I've read one or two bits. So if you do want to study that, then maybe over the next week at Christmas time when you've got some time off work, that could be something for you to look at. But not only do we see that Jesus was born in poverty, in his birth, we trace that through his life and we see it in his death.

We read elsewhere in Scripture that he became poor for our sakes, that we might be rich. Jesus didn't come to seek out fame or fortune, to be born into a palace with money and wealth.

You know, the only thing that Jesus came to seek was the lost and he is still seeking. I think it's amazing as we start to understand the story of Jesus' birth and his life and his death that we can really be taken up with this simplicity in what we are asked to believe.

What happened roughly 2,023 years ago is recorded simply and accurately so that we might understand how the God of creation, the God of eternity, is a God who wants to be known by us.

[15:12] A God who has made the way known to know him, not something that only the clever or the wise can attain. For Jesus reminds us that it is the simple faith that is required to believe.

Which leads me on to the second journey in a reading in this chapter. And this is a journey that the angels made from heaven to a hillside. It's not the first angelic appearance in our song trilogy over

the last three weeks.

The angel appeared both to Zechariah and to Mary. And in keeping with the other appearances, he invites the shepherds to not be afraid.

We sometimes have a rosy view of the nativity scene. I guess maybe some of our Christmas cards depict it in a way that creates that soft, fuzzy feeling within us.

But interrupting this dark, quiet, excuse me, interrupting this quiet and dark night, this quiet and dark hillside scene was the presence of an angel and with him the brightness and the glory of the Lord.

[16:27] This angel brought about a message to the world. And in fact, it is probably the first gospel message.

See, the angel brought good news. Literally, it is the same word that we use for gospel. And it is a good news of great joy. I think there is no better message and I guess for all of us here who are Christians and we would agree with this, there is no better message than that of the gospel and we should not be afraid of it.

It is a message of God's love and God's justice, a message of his mercy and his compassion, but also of his righteousness and his holiness.

It is interesting that we see this message is declared to shepherds. Again, I think we have sometimes a rosy understanding of what a shepherd is.

But in this day that we are thinking about, shepherds were not people who were trusted. They were a kind of outcast class of society and they were unlikely to be well educated either.

[17:44] That they should come and see the saviour first of all and to witness his birth is quite remarkable. We are told that the shepherds were so untrustworthy in other places that they weren't even allowed to be a witness in a court and yet God chooses them to witness the birth of his son.

The message that the angels brought was this, a message that a saviour was born. And I want to emphasise that point this morning. Jesus is first announced on the stage as a saviour.

Not a king, not a wise man, not a judge or a reformer, but a saviour. His name means that he will save and this is why it is good news.

Not just good news for the shepherds or the Jews or the people of that time, but for all people, the angels said. And the reason for this is because this is exactly what this world needed and still needs.

A saviour who would take away the sins of the world, a saviour that would reconcile man to God. I think it's still amazing news for all people.

[19:01] You know, we live in a world as we've been thinking about this year, in fact the last two years we've been thinking about this a lot. We live in a world not unlike the world that we've described around the time of Caesar Augustus.

There is war going on, there is unrest, there is sadness. Not just here in Edinburgh or in Scotland, but across the globe this is the same.

But our message of great joy is just as powerful today as it was then. good news that is indeed great joy.

So what was the news then? We thought about how good it was and how much joy it would bring, but what is this news? Well, the angel said to the shepherds this, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a saviour which is Christ the Lord.

Probably a memory verse that you came to Sunday school or any other church related activities. Certainly in your schools this is a verse that children would have learned from whatever age.

[20:07] And it's probably, we often say that John 3.16 is probably the best known verse in the world and it likely is. But I would hazard a guess that this is probably one of the most well known verses.

But even if you are an atheist or even if you don't believe in God then this is a verse that you'll have seen at Christmas time over the years. A saviour who is Christ the Lord.

This is an amazing title. It's not just an announcement. It's not just a sentence. It's a title. Firstly, because the word saviour, he is a saviour is expressed in his name Jesus.

We know that that name means that he will save. Secondly, he is the Christ, the anointed of God, the Messiah of Israel. And thirdly, he is the Lord, God manifest in flesh.

The angels tell the shepherds what's happening down in Bethlehem and not only what's happening but why it's happening. It describes the scenes and what to look for. A baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

[ 21 : 20 ] They don't have to hope that they're going to find this baby. The angel told them that this would be a sign. I don't know how many other babies would be born in Bethlehem at that time.

I mean, certainly if you go to your appointments in the Simpsons Memorial then you'll see a string of people coming in and out and I'm not sure if it would have been the same in Bethlehem at that time that there would have been a number of babies born.

But this was the sign that the angel told them that a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a manger. And then, in stark contrast to our first scene, we see this good news of great joy erupting in song as suddenly there is a great heavenly host joined with the angel praising God saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.

Gloria in excelsis deo. Glory to God peace on earth. We thought earlier about Caesar Augustus bringing peace to the region after he defeated his enemies.

But peace isn't just the absence of war or the absence of poverty or the absence of famine.

Augustus couldn't bring peace from passion from grief from envy or guilt and he cannot give peace of heart for which man yearns more than anything else even for outward peace.

[ 23 : 00 ] Now, Jesus' life in ministry would bring both glory to God in the highest and it would bring peace on earth, good will towards men or, depending on which version you read, peace among those with whom he is pleased.

God is well pleased with those who repent of their sin and receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The peace that Jesus offers us is not, as he reminds us in John 14, as the world give peace.

It's not a temporary, fragile, only to be disturbed at the slightest offence peace. The peace that is offered by him is deep and eternal and meaningful peace.

One of having no enmity with God, not being an enemy of God, in fact, being a friend of God, and if you, I was smiling as we sung it because it's in one of the lines of the hymns that we sung this morning.

Becoming a friend of God, having no burden of our sin or the guilt of our sin to deal with, instead, having our sins removed as far as the east is from the west and having them remembered no more.

[ 24 : 17 ] Jesus takes our sin by his atoning death on the cross. His death is what brings about peace. And as he becomes our saviour, he leads us in a way that allows us to enjoy that peace that passes all human understanding.

But in order to die, he must have been born. And that's what we're thinking about this morning. Well, we've come to our third journey.

As soon as the angels departed, the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem, which is probably the first Christmas rush. I'm not sure that they would have been dashing through the snow because shepherds out in the fields, it was probably quite a mild winter in Israel that year.

But the shepherds rushed from the hillside to Bethlehem to find the one whom they had been told about. the third journey in our passage. And oh, did they have a playlist.

They found Mary and Joseph and Jesus lying in a manger and they found him because they sought him. They looked for what was told by the angels and they found him. Now, this reminds me of a verse in Isaiah.

[ 25 : 32 ] It says this, you will seek me and you will find me when you seek me with all your heart. That's a challenge for us this Christmas amid the noise and the chaos. Are we looking for him?

Are we seeking him? The shepherds, they came and they gave a complete report of the angels visit causing probably quite considerable surprise amongst those who had gathered in the stable.

As it says, for all who heard, they wondered. But Mary had a deeper understanding of all these things and she treasured them up in her heart and she knowingly pondered them.

When you leave here today, I wonder if I can ask you to wonder about these things and to ponder them in your heart. Do we really understand the Christmas story?

Or do we just understand the historical facts that we thought about this morning about this great episode God in Luke chapter 2? Or does the meaning behind it really create a spark of light and joy in our lives?

[ 26 : 47 ] You see, the shepherds returned to their flocks overjoyed in all that they had seen and heard and overflowing in the worship of God. I think the shepherds are good examples for us to imitate today.

They received by faith the message that God had sent them and they responded with immediate obedience. They came to Jesus and after finding him, they reported the good news to others, glorifying and praising God.

And then they humbly returned to their duties. Well, by doing that, they weren't just the same men going back to the same old job. You see, when we find Jesus, our lives are changed.

You can't come face to face with Jesus and remain unchanged. Now, I said at the beginning, the passage is a fairly well-known passage, and just bear with me for a few minutes.

You see, even though our passage is very well-known, it's a story that still requires a response from us. Now, I wonder if the words of that song that I mentioned at the start can be changed slightly for us.

[ 28 : 03 ] I couldn't care what's under the tree. I don't know what I'm getting for Christmas this year, but I hope it draws me to thee. Verse 21 says this, and on the eighth day, he was called Jesus.

Why? Because that was the name that was given to him by the angel before he was conceived.

And because that is the name that means he will save his people from their sin.

Whatever you do today, and whatever you do tomorrow, maybe, and even as we sing this last hymn, maybe that we do think about this message this morning, that we wonder about it, that we ponder about it.

We don't just think of these journeys, we don't just think of the songs, we don't just think of the narrative that we read, and if you don't have a Christmas tradition, then maybe this is one tradition that you could take.

Read this narrative every Christmas. But more than that, I wonder if we could just wonder and ponder at this so that we really understand the real meaning of Christmas, that Jesus came to be born in order that he might save people from their sins.

[ 29 : 23 ] Christmas money 2019 develops a■■■r more days millions trong décision phía 00 00