

Watchnight Service 2019

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[0 : 00] It's the 24th of December and I cannot believe it. I don't know about you guys but this year Christmas has come out of the blue for my wife and I. And so on Sunday evening, in a desperate attempt to get into the spirit of Christmas, whatever that thing is, we sat down and watched a Christmas movie.

And there was a song in that movie that caught both of our attentions and it started off like this. You can keep your peace on earth. You can keep your holy birth. Keep your frankincense and myrrh. Christmas cheer. What's that worth?

I want something I can use. Designer clothes or groovy shoes. I want diamonds big and rough. All I want is Christmas stuff. Now most people probably wouldn't say this or express it in such a blunt way.

But the sentiment is probably there on many of our hearts and minds this time of year. The focus of Christmas has become the big red man in a suit or the big man in a red suit rather than the baby in a manger.

The focus is the number and worth of gifts that we have sitting under the Christmas tree at home. Sure we like to throw in the nativity scene here and there.

[1 : 22] To add that little bit of romance. We like to see pictures like this. Of a cute little baby Jesus who's sleeping away in a manger. Of cattle sitting in the corner munching on hay all contently, not making a sound to wake the little baby.

And Mary and Joseph all happy and smiling as they stare down at their newborn baby son. But that's the extent that people are happy to let the real meaning of Christmas invade their lives, isn't it?

People are happy to include Jesus in Christmas as long as he doesn't go beyond the boundaries that we set for him. As long as he doesn't cause offense or call us to do something uncomfortable or upset our view of Christmas.

But this evening I want to introduce you to a Jesus. Not the Christmas add-on Jesus. But the Jesus who we have sung about in some of these carols this evening.

Jesus the King. Jesus the Lord. The Prince of Peace. God with us. Jesus God in the flesh. Jesus our Saviour.

[2 : 37] If we see Jesus for who he really is this evening. If we truly understand who this baby in a manger is.

Then our focus won't be on what is at home underneath the Christmas tree. But our focus will change to the gifts that we can give him. As we like the Magi come before him in adoration and worship.

Giving him our prized possessions and worshipping him for who he is. God. God. So join me for a few minutes as we dive into the passage that Susan read out to us earlier in the service.

From Colossians 1. And we'll think about some magnificent truths about the person of Jesus and who he really is. So as we look at this baby in a manger.

We know it's Jesus. But the question is who is he? Paul the writer of the letter to the Colossians presents us with a very different picture from the sanitized nativity scene that we've grown to love.

[3 : 43] He tells us in verse 15 that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. And in verse 19 that the fullness of God dwells in him.

Now I've been a Christian now for about 10 years. And I still cannot even begin to comprehend what that means and how it works.

That God. The eternal one. The one who made all things. Humbled himself. Takes on flesh. And became a defenseless little baby.

One of the questions I get asked a lot is what is God like? And that's a phenomenal question to ask. And the truth is that we can only understand a fraction of who he really is.

But what these verses say is that if you want to know what God is like. Look at the person of Jesus Christ because the fullness of God dwells in him.

[4 : 45] Now think about that for a second. The Bible gives descriptions of God as the very nature of holiness. Meaning that no person can come near or even look at him.

Descriptions of God's glory that would invoke no other response than immediate worship. And descriptions of love and protection.

That even the most imaginative mind cannot begin to ponder. And all of these mind-blowing wonderful truths. Find themselves in this little baby in a manger.

I can't wrap my head around it. But isn't it wonderful news that we're not left guessing. About what God is like. Because all we need to do is look at Jesus.

And we can see who God is. God revealed himself to the world in the person of his son Jesus. God in the flesh. But Paul keeps on going in verse 16.

[5 : 48] And he says that all things were created through Jesus and for Jesus. So as you leave the building this evening. Maybe you'll look up at the sky.

And you'll see stars. Too many to count. Think about all the other Christmas services going on across the globe this evening. All the different cities and towns and scenery that surround them. Even just the ability to think about all of that. Is only possible through this little baby in a manger. God in the flesh.

Jesus is the creator of all things. And verse 17. The sustainer of all things. So the hands that reached up for his mother from the crib.

Were the hands that flung stars and put them in their place. That little baby is the one who keeps our world turning. The one who knows all things and maintains all things.

[6 : 52] As the carol Mary did you know says. Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation. That's who he is. And that's what Paul says in verse 15.

That he is the first born of all creation. He is saying that Jesus is the most important person. Because he is the son of God. Jesus existence didn't start in Bethlehem when he was born. Around 2000 years ago. He has always existed. In perfect harmony and relationship with God the father. And together with God the Holy Spirit.

They have made life as we know it possible. And on top of all of that. Verse 18. Jesus is the first born from the dead.

Meaning that he is the first to have been raised from death. Never to die again. Jesus is the beginning of something completely new.

[7 : 51] Now these aren't normally the things that we think about. When we come to the Christmas story. Are they? But these all point to the true identity of Jesus.

That he is God in the flesh. God with us. And so if that is who he is. The question I find myself asking is. Well why did he come?

Imagine you live in the most beautiful place you can imagine. You have a wonderful big home. You have people who look after you.

Who tend to your every single need. You're respected. You're honoured. And then you have the option to move. But this move means that you're going to a place where you're hated.

Where everybody wants rid of you. Which of us would be up for doing that? I know I certainly wouldn't. That's exactly what Jesus did.

[8 : 53] See he did. He had everything at the right hand of God. In his place of glory. In perfect harmony and relationship with the Godhead. Yet he chose to step down.

Into the world. That would hate him. And the reason Jesus came. And the details of what he did. Are told to us plainly in verse 20.

To reconcile. To himself. That is God. All things. Whether things on earth. Or things in heaven. By making peace through his blood.

Shed on the cross. This verse suggests something that we know to be true. That there is something wrong with our world.

We have so much hunger. So much war. So much hatred. But there's also a problem in us.

[9 : 48] Isn't there? Our own terrible thoughts. How easy and natural it is for us to lie. And how selfish we can be. One of the times that we feel this brokenness.

Is actually now at Christmas. Families all gather together. And sadly arguments can kick off very easily. And family disputes ruin the festivities. And all of these things the Bible says.

Are a result of sin. So in the beginning of the Bible. We're presented with a problem of sin. The moment Adam and Eve said no to God's rule.

And they rejected him. And from then on. Every single human being. Has been marked by that same rebellion. And the devastating news about sin.

Is that it makes us enemies of God. That's what Paul says in verse 21. Once you were alienated from God. And were enemies in your minds. Because of your evil behavior.

[10 : 48] That is the fatal diagnosis. That is true for every single human heart. And our temptation is to try and work on ourselves.

To make ourselves better. We think the more we do. Maybe just maybe. We can get back in God's good books. And that's why bookshops are filled with self-help books.

We know there's a problem. We know something isn't right. We just don't know how to fix it. And so we turn to ourselves. And we try to be better people.

But the truth is. That we will never do enough. To be right with God. We can never work hard enough. To be right with God.

But the best news. Is that God doesn't cast us off. Instead he comes down. To us. God promised to send one.

[11 : 49] Who would defeat sin. One who would right. Every single wrong. And one who would make it possible. For a broken humanity. To be reconciled.

To be made right. With a holy God. God. That is what we see. In baby Jesus in the manger. That is what the Magi.

Understood to an extent. As they traveled from a distant land. Bringing gifts. To worship. This little baby. At Bethlehem.

God stepped down into our mess. To make forgiveness possible. And to reconcile. Us with God. God. How is that possible?

How could this little baby. Do such a great thing? Well as Paul says. In verse 20. He did it by. Making peace.

[12 : 45] Through his blood. Shed on the cross. Because of our sin. We are naturally born. Into the status. Of being enemies. Of God. God. But Jesus made it possible.

For our status to change. And to be children of God. The chance to be forgiven. And made right. With God. The way. Things were supposed to be. That is the only possibility.

And is only possible. Because of Jesus. Who went on. From the manger. To live the perfect life. That we never could. And then to die the death.

That we all deserve. Bearing the weight of sin. And the wrath of God. But then three days later. Rose triumphant from the grave.

Defeating sin. Conquering death. So that everyone who calls him Lord. And confesses him as king. As peace with God.

[13 : 47] Is made right. With God. Friends. That is the real meaning of Christmas. But don't just take my word for it.

On the pews in front of you. You'll find a little booklet. Called Jesus the fact. And in that. You have the account of the life of Jesus. Written by doctor turned historian.

Who checked the stories for himself. Shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus. See for yourself. This Christmas.

Exactly who this little baby in the manger is. And see what he has done. And how you too can be made right with God. Friends. As we draw to a close.

If we see Jesus. For who he really is. If we truly understand. Who this baby in a manger is. Then our focus. Won't be on Christmas stuff.

[14 : 46] That's sitting under the tree at home. Instead. Our focus will be on the gifts. That we can bring him. As we worship him. And adore him.

As we look forward to time. With friends and family. In the coming days. Let's remember. That we actually celebrate. The birth of Jesus. But not just the baby in a manger.

We celebrate him as God with us. As the one who came into the world. So that we can be reconciled with God. Wouldn't it be great if this year.

Instead of the song of our lives. Being like the lyrics of that in the movie. All about stuff that we want to get. All about money and possessions. But instead.

If the song for our Christmas. If the song for the rest of our lives. Was the lyrics that we're just about to sing. Lord we greet thee. Born this happy morning. Lord Jesus to thee be glory given.

[15 : 50] Word of the Father. Now in flesh. Appearing. Oh come. Let us adore him. Let's come and adore him together.

As we pray. Let's pray together. Jesus you are God in the flesh. And we gather this evening.

And over the next few days. We will be celebrating that birth. Heavenly Father. We thank you that your plan of salvation. Happened. We thank you that you're a faithful God.

Who fulfills his promises. And Jesus we thank you that you were willing to step down into our mess. And our broken world. So that sinners like us.

Can be made right with a holy God. What a privilege. Jesus help us keep our focus and our eyes on you this Christmas time.

[16 : 46] We ask this. For your glory. And in the name of Jesus. Amen.