

Watchnight Service 2021

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[0 : 00] Thank you very much, Fiona and John. Now, I wonder what responses we would get if we took to the streets and asked people what the meaning of Christmas was.

Now, this week I've watched a good number of video interviews on YouTube. Honestly, it was for sermon prep, not just passing my time. And I watched videos where people did that very thing.

They took to the streets and said, what is Christmas all about? And the answers were very funny and very telling. So one uni student, for example, said that Christmas meant going home to a warm house, a soft, comfy bed, a place where you didn't have to worry about everything, where the food wasn't bought for a pound out of Iceland and laundry was done for them magically.

Whilst at uni, they lived in a freezing flat with no heating and a rock hard bed. One granddad said that Christmas was a time where all of his grandkids were in the same room together and they sang a few songs.

The kids quickly ended up playing with their toys. But it was a nice time together where they all had a laugh. Now, lots of other people focused on the food, the vast amounts of turkey, the gravy, all the stuffing you can eat and roast potatoes.

[1 : 18] That would make you a couch potato for a day or two. Enough time in front of the TV to switch off. And one man said enough time to have a proper drink.

A group of teenagers said that the meaning of Christmas was money, gifts, food and clothes. Nothing else mattered. Of the 50 different interviews roughly that I watched, only one person interviewed made any reference to any form of church service.

And even then the focus was the carols and the mince pies and the chat afterwards, rather than anything else or anyone else. Now, Christmas is a well-established part of our lives and our culture, isn't it?

But so often the day comes and goes with everything focusing on what Christmas means to them. Not necessarily what Christmas is really all about.

So instead of us taking to the streets this evening, it is quarter to 12 at night and asking people what Christmas is all about. I want us to turn to the Bible and ask that same question.

[2 : 28] In Philippians 2 verses 5 to 11 that Fiona read to us earlier, we get the answer to what or who, rather, Christmas is all about.

It tells us the reality, the reason and the result of Christmas. And my prayer is that seeing these three things will transform how we celebrate Christmas tomorrow morning.

And maybe even change the way we think about what Christmas is all about. So the first thing we see in this passage, if you have it open in front of you, is the reality of Christmas.

In verses 5 to 7, the reality of Christmas. Now the Apostle Paul, the person who wrote this letter to a small church, who seems to be getting caught up in selfish desires, in rivalry and in pride.

People making much of themselves and not thinking about others in the church and not thinking about Jesus much either. That sounds a little bit familiar, doesn't it?

[3 : 36] It's easy during Christmas to focus on everything else except for Jesus. The nativity scene becomes that nice little ornament and it gets pushed further and further back the more Christmas cards come through the post.

Jesus is seen as nothing more than just a cute little baby. Realistically, in many homes up and down this country, Jesus is only ever thought about twice a year.

Once at Easter and once at Christmas. We're not really too dissimilar from this little church, are we? But Paul says, be different.

Take Jesus as your example. You see, he had reason to boast. What were his reasons? Verse 6 says that Jesus was the very nature of God.

Meaning, if you want to know what God is like. If you want to know how God would respond or react to certain situations, you look to Jesus. He is God in the flesh.

[4 : 41] See, we're tempted to think that Jesus' life began when he drew his first breath. Or when he made his first cry on this earth. But this passage tells us that Jesus is far, far greater than that.

He is God. There has never been a time where Jesus didn't exist. There will never be a time where Jesus doesn't exist. He has always been.

And he will always be. That very first Christmas was just the first time he took on flesh and came to live with people. I've been a Christian for a good number of years now.

And I still can't fully grasp the immensity of that wonderful truth. There is no comparison that we can draw to explain what Jesus did by leaving heaven and coming and taking on flesh.

Sure, we can think about maybe the queen who's surrounded by butlers and staff members waiting on her hand and foot all the time. For her then to leave Buckingham Palace and to live in a hut in the middle of the woods would be unthinkable.

[5 : 46] Or we can imagine maybe living in a castle with picturesque mountains around you. Breathtaking views. Voluntarily leaving that to go and live in a studio flat in an industrial city with a tiny window where all you see opposite you is a concrete wall.

Now those are just tiny little illustrations. But none of them really compare to what Jesus did. Because he is the only one that really deserves all the glory and perfection.

And yet he left that and took on flesh for us. And he didn't use his divine nature as God in the flesh as something to be used for his own advantage.

Jesus had every right to come into this world and to take. He could have been born in a palace. He could have demanded a throne.

A kingdom. Power and authority over countries and armies. He could have come to take, take, take. But instead verse 7 says that Jesus humbled himself.

[7 : 00] It says in verse 7, He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant. Being made in human likeness. Now in a time of year when the world is thinking about receiving gifts, the mantra is take, take and take.

But the real message of Christmas is that Jesus humbled himself. Step down from his place of glory and majesty. Taking the form of a defenseless, vulnerable child.

To give, give, give. The reality of Christmas is the king of this world. God took on flesh and came to dwell in our world of mess.

God took on the form of humanity becoming like us yet still being fully God. The king left his throne for a crib. Jesus had to become one of us.

He had to take on flesh so that he could identify with us and be tested and tried in every way like we are. But why? Well that's the second thing we see in this passage.

[8 : 13] The reason for Christmas in verse 8. The reason for Christmas. Look at verse 8 with me. It says that Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

So why would Jesus voluntarily leave his place of glory and splendor in heaven to come into a world of mess? A world of pain, of isolation and darkness?

The answer has to be the cross. Because the crib makes no sense without the cross. The cross is the most important moment in history.

Because it's the moment that God had planned from the very beginning of time. The moment where Jesus, God in the flesh, would bear all the weight of sin.

Where he would take the punishment that we all deserve and that he would die. So that rebellious people like us can live.

[9 : 15] Realistically, we think of God a little bit like Santa. A big man with a beard who lives far, far away and who keeps a list of naughty and nice people.

The nice people are those who receive gifts. Who are blessed and you have a relatively easy, straightforward life. And the naughty people are those who deserve to be punished.

But you see, the Bible tells us a completely different story. And a much more beautiful and comforting one at that. The reality is that each and every one of us has done wrong in God's sight.

We have rebelled against him from the very beginning of time. And we continue to do so every single day. Therefore, every person is rightly under the just wrath and anger of God.

But we can't do anything about it ourselves. See, this just and glorious God created us to be in union in a relationship with him.

[10 : 27] But we're sinful humans. We can't enter that glory with God because he is holy and we are not. It's not about being a goody two-shoes. We can't work our way into heaven, work our way into God's good books.

Because sin penetrates every area of our lives. And I think deep down we all know this to be true, don't we? We all hurt people.

We don't need to be taught to lie or to throw a tantrum or to pull people down with our words. We can't be good enough. We can't do enough good deeds to be right with God again because we need someone from outside to come into our sinful world, into our mess, to reunite us with God.

Someone who is perfect, who can do that work on our behalf. And so the reason for Christmas is that God, out of his amazing love, out of his amazing kindness, sent Jesus Christ into the world so that we could be forgiven and made right with God.

That happened some 33 years after the birth of Jesus. Jesus needed to be forgiven and made right with us. On the day that he was nailed to a Roman cross and publicly executed, though innocent.

[11 : 48] Jesus needed to become one of us so that he could take the punishment that we deserve. But it wasn't the Romans or Pilate or Herod who forced Jesus to be humbled to the point of dying on a cross.

The passage says Jesus voluntarily and obediently followed the will of God, the Father. It wasn't done on a whim. It wasn't an accident.

But it was God's plan of salvation from the very beginning of time. As one of the most famous Bible verses says, John 3, 16, Friends, the real reason for Christmas, the reason that Jesus was born in a crib was so that he could go to the cross.

Not so that he could take, take, take, but so that he could give eternal life. So that he could give a true relationship to us again with God.

And so that he could give forgiveness to a sinful people like you and me. So the reality of Christmas is that God, the Son, humbled himself and was born in a crib.

[13 : 10] The reason for Christmas was so that Jesus, God in the flesh, could go to the cross and die in our place. And the third and final thing this passage teaches us is the result of Christmas.

Verses 9 to 11, the result of Christmas. Verses 9 to 11 say this. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.

That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. And every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

The death of Jesus on the cross was not the end of the story. Three days later, he would rise from the grave. And he is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven, exalted above all things.

And he has been given that greatest seat of honor. Jesus has been crowned Lord and returned to his place of kingship and authority. And he has been crowned because of the work that he did in the crib.

[14 : 23] Because of the work that he did on the cross. Jesus, having completed his work of making forgiveness possible for all those who believe and put their trust in him, sits down.

His work is complete. He is the perfect servant king that we were listening to earlier on. Crowned in splendor and majesty. And it has two results for us this evening.

See, Jesus was exalted above everyone else so that one, every knee will bow before him. And two, that every tongue confess him as Lord.

Now the Bible makes it abundantly clear that a day is coming when all people will kneel and confess Jesus as Lord. Christians will make that confession with great joy and humility as we eagerly await that day of Jesus' return.

But others will make that confession with despair and anguish. Because in their lives they rejected Jesus and wanted nothing to do with him.

[15 : 33] Friends, the result of Christmas is that Jesus is crowned Lord of all creation. Over everything that has been made and that includes your life.

If you're a Christian here this evening, as we enter these next few days of celebrations, let us worship and adore our wonderful God.

Who has done amazing things and made forgiveness possible. Made it possible for us to have a relationship with God again. Let us be in awe of Jesus.

God in the flesh who came to the crib to go to the cross and who is now crowned above all. And if you're not a Christian here this evening, remember those three words.

Crib, cross and crown. And I invite you over the next few days to investigate what they really mean. And if you have questions, please do grab me afterwards or fire me an email.

[16 : 32] It's all on the website. And I'd love to chat to you about it. Friends, the real meaning of Christmas is not the things we thought about in the beginning. It's not about gifts.

It's not even about time with friends and family. It's not about a few days off work and good food. As good and fun as all those things are. And they are to be enjoyed. But the true meaning of Christmas is that Jesus humbled himself.

That he took on flesh being born in a crib. That Jesus being God in the flesh willingly went to the cross to die for the sins of the world. And that Jesus being raised to life is now exalted and has been given a crown because he is Lord over all things.

Will you consider those truths this Christmas time? And come in humility and confess Jesus as Lord and worship him. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, at this time of Christmas, we as a whole country often reflect. We take time out from the busyness of our lives and we take stock of a year that's gone past and a year that is coming.

[17 : 46] Lord, my prayer is that this evening we would reflect on who you are. Reflect on the real meaning of Christmas.

The birth of Jesus Christ. That led to the cross which brings forgiveness. And that results in his wonderful exaltation as he is crowned Lord of all.

Help us reflect on him and humbly come and confess him as Lord. In his name we pray. Amen.