

Angel's Song

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Date: 16 December 2018

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[0 : 00] My name is Graeme, I've got the privilege of being the minister here at the church, and this time of year is just a joy for me, I love it. Didn't the kids do well? Who knew the angels had such good dance moves, I tell you.

I love Christmas, I love Christmas because I celebrate, generally, the wonderful, life-transforming news that Jesus is born. I love Christmas because I get to do something that all of a sudden becomes socially acceptable, and that thing is to play board games.

One of my favourite board games, one of you play this one at Christmas time, is this one. Yeah? Articulate, I love articulate. I get to play it with my brothers, so it's a good laugh.

Well, to get us into festive spirit, I thought we'd play a game of Christmas-themed articulate. Are you up for it? Yeah? So I will give you three words, and boys and girls, I'm particularly looking at you guys.

I want you to tell me what thing I'm describing, okay? So I'll ease you into this, so it's nice and easy to begin with. So if I said, red-nosed reindeer sled, what would you think of?

[1 : 07] Yeah? What would you think of? Rudolph. Rudolph. Okay. So, here's Rudolph. If I said, Liz Palace Sofa, what would you think of?

Queen Elizabeth. Maybe you can phone a friend if you want. Your mum's sitting on the sofa. I'm worth it. Do you know what? That... That... That... That's a good shout.

Okay, I'm thinking of the Queen's Speech. Oh, sorry, Joe. Doesn't she look well? Doesn't at least she look well. What if I said, Kevin, New York House? Home Alone.

Here he is. Our favourite, Kev. And if I said... And this is maybe a slightly more difficult one, okay? What if I said, Penguin Bear Monster? For...

Not for M&S.; It's for John Lewis. Other department stores are available, but... John Lewis Christmas ads. They're good fun, aren't they? But what if I said... This is the last one.

[2 : 08] What if I said... Unimportant, lowly, nobodies? No, don't... Do you know who I'd be describing to you?

I'd be describing to you the shepherds as we meet them in Luke chapter 2. That's a bit surprising, isn't it? What do they describe them as? Insignificant, lowly, nobodies.

That's the shepherds as we meet them in Luke chapter 2. If you've got a Bible there, maybe you want to turn there back to Luke chapter 2 that we read a minute ago. I think the reason we're surprised is because we hear that word shepherd, and we think in our minds, we think countryfile, quad bike, and we think crufts winning worthy sheepdog.

That's what we think, isn't it, when we think of shepherds in our Western mindset. But not... That's not what you think of in the first century in the Middle East. That's not a shepherd. Shepherding in this day was a job for those at the very bottom of the social ladder.

It was an unsociable job. It was an undesirable job. And if you read some historians, they'll tell you that it was a notorious job that was actually done by some pretty dodgy people. These are the shepherds.

- [3 : 25] But a main thing is to these insignificant lowly nobodies that God chose to be the first people to hear about the birth of his son. That's incredible.
- These shepherds. Not assorted people, but lowly and messed up people like me and like you.
- Right there is the wonderful truth about the God who's right at the heart of the Bible. He has a heart for the outsider. This is this God. He has a love for the broken. He has a desire to rescue the sinful.
- This is the God that's right at the heart of the Christmas story. And for me, coming across the good news at the heart of Christianity that we would call the gospel, the good news is the news that's transformed my life.
- And for billions of people around this globe, and for billions upon billions of people during the ages, this is the news that's transformed their lives. Because Christmas is all about the arrival of this good news.
- [4 : 32] Now, we love our Christmas songs, don't we, at Christmas time? Hands up if you love a Christmas song. So I'm going to do something slightly different this morning. I'm going to introduce you to a Christmas chant. Okay?
- You up for a Christmas chant? Come on, act like you're up for it. Up for a Christmas chant. Yes, that's it. Here is the Luke 2 Christmas chant. This is what the angels say to the shepherds.
- You ready for this? They have good news of great joy for all people. Say it with me. They have good news of great joy for all people.
- One more time. Repetition, the mother of education. Good news of great joy for all people. So Luke, the doctor-cum-historian, he's reliably written this down so that you and I would be able to read this decades later.
- And scene 1, do you see it? It takes place in the hills. Here are our shepherds, if you've got it there. Verse 8. And they are out there in what seems to be just an ordinary night.
- [5 : 32] There they are. What does Luke tell us? They are living in the fields. They are keeping watch over their flocks, just doing their usual thing. Nothing to see here, says Luke.
- Just doing their usual thing. But life as these guys know it, is about to be well and truly flipped on its head because they are about to be hit with good news of great joy for all people.
- And scene 2, do you see it? It takes place in the sky. All of a sudden, verse 9, this angel appears to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, which is Luke's way of telling us that God himself is right here in this moment.
- How cool is that? God is right here in this moment. It's funny, isn't it? The angels in the Bible, they're a bit like Edinburgh buses, aren't they? I mean, you wait for ages for one to come along and then all of a sudden three come at once.
- Because we've already had, haven't we, shepherds? Terrific. Terrific. No. Terrified. Terrified. I loved how these guys said it, didn't they? The shepherds earlier in the play.
- [6 : 39] Terrified. But the angels come to bring them good news. Do you see? What is it? Is it bad news? Is it noteworthy news? No, it's good news. And what will it bring? Moderate yet controllable levels of British excitement?
- No. No. Great joy. And who is it for? Some people. Qualified people? No. All people. And this is where you and I come in to this story.
- Because whoever you are here this morning, this news is for you. It's for you. It's for young and old. For men and women. For rich and poor. For good and bad.

For the religious. For the non-religious. For the prince. For the pauper. For the Scottish. The English. And even the Northern Irish too. This really is good news of great joy for all people.

But how? I can hear my standard grade maths teacher in my ear saying, Shanks, show you're working. How is this good news of great joy for all people?

[7 : 44] How? Well, because of, do you see it? Verse 11. Who does this center on? Not a decent bloke. Not a moral teacher. Not even a strong and stable political leader.

Friends, if that was our biggest problem, that's exactly who God would have sent 2,000 years ago. No matter what the events of this week have taught you to think. God sent, do you see?

A saviour. That's what we need. We need a saviour. To do what? To save us. Because we are lost without this God. We are not right with him outside of Jesus.

And so God sent us a saviour. So what his name means, Jesus, just means God saves. That's exactly what this baby has come to do.

For this same Jesus, he would grow up. He would be the sinless man. He would give his life for our sin on the cross. So that God rejecters and dark preferers like you and like me could be made right with and brought back to the very God who made us in his image in the first place.

[9 : 02] Do you see that word that's right at the heart of the angel's song? Peace. Peace. It's a wonderful gospel word. Peace. Jesus has come to offer that shalom, that rightness with the God who made us so that we can live in a harmonious and joyous and eternal relationship with him.

What did we sing earlier? Peace on earth and mercy mild. God and sinners reconciled. And that peace with God is on offer this morning and it's only possible through faith in this Jesus.

Friends, that really, really, really is good news of great joy for all people. And do you see heaven's take on this?

What God is doing here for a broken and rebellious world? Do you see how their take on it? Is that it is truly magnificent. So much so that a flash mob of angels, do you see them there, burst into song, praising God for what he is doing right here in this moment.

Shame they didn't have smartphones in this day, isn't it? So I'd love to have heard that song. I'd love to have seen that scene recorded. What a shepherd selfie that would have been.

[10 : 21] But what are the shepherds going to do? Well, they were hardly going to sit down after that, were they? Scene 3 takes place in the manger. Verse 16, the shepherds find the Bethlehem scene exactly as the angel described it.

There's Mary, there's Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. A manger, just an animal's feeding trough. You see, this king, God's king, the setting for his birth, is not the Marriott suite.

It's the manger suite. And here he is, not wrapped in the finest cotton, but here he is, swaddled in the frailest cloth.

God's king, get your head around that, came and was born not into luxury, but into poverty. See how there's something so incredibly simple about this birth.

There is no royal procession, there's no Bethlehem brass band, there's no swagger, there's no grandeur. And yet, here is the most significant birth that has ever or will ever take place in human history.

[11 : 28] Because this is God come down. Here he is, in the person of Jesus, in our flesh. Here is God entering our broken story.

Here is God stepping down into our everyday existence. And why? Well, to rescue broken, messy, sinful people like me, and like you, and like these shepherds.

Friends, that really, really, really is good news of great joy for all people. And scene four, do you see how it takes place in the street?

It takes place in the street. Verse 20, the shepherds, what do they do? They return home. And what do they do? Do they make a scrapbook? No. Do they dictate some memoirs?

No. What do they do? They spread the word. Do you see how they hit the streets? Anybody they can find? Let me tell you what just happened to us. You'll never guess what we just saw.

[12 : 28] And let us tell you what it all means. What God has done for a broken man. Do you see how this news is so life-transformingly good that they can't keep it to themselves?

They've got to get out there. They've got to tell others about what God has done. You know, we took our girls out to see the Light Palace on George Street last week. Has anyone seen the Light Palace on George Street?

Yeah, a few of us. So we're walking past this Light Palace. I don't know if that's what it's called. This is what I'm going to call it. Okay. Walking past this Light Palace. And because we're Scottish and we found out you needed to pay, we thought, no, we're not paying.

So we're walking past it. And we're looking in from the outside. And all we can see is a whole bunch of people, each with their own set of head muffed earphones on.

And they're just sitting there dancing. Have you seen this on George Street? Right? And I'm thinking, looking in at this, thinking, what in the name of the wee man is going on in there? So there they are dancing away.

[13 : 30] And I found out later that this thing is called a silent disco. Have you heard of this? Silent disco. As if to say, my headphones are on, there's a party going on in my head, but no one else is invited.

That's what silent disco is, isn't it? See how the shepherds did the opposite of a silent disco? And you see how we're called this morning as God's people is to not do the example of the silent disco, but to follow the example of the shepherds.

This isn't an in-house party. This is not a party for one. This is a party for the world to know about. We want to tell people how good this news is.

Forgiveness of sins is an offer through this baby born here. Fullness of life is an offer in his name. Peace with God is on offer by trusting in this baby whose earthly life started in Bethlehem.

That is incredible. That I get to know the God who made me. I get to be right with him because of my faith in what his son has done on the cross. That is incredible. That is incredible.

[14 : 31] And that really, really, really is good news of great joy for all people. Now, are you up for a bit of Christmas articulate to finish?

Yeah? Right. If I said, here we go, Dickens, Little Tommy and Bahumbug, what would you think? Yeah? Well, I've got Scrooge, but yeah, she would think Christmas Carol.

That's great. What if I said, Will Ferrell, Santa, I know him. What would you say? Yeah. Yeah, there he is. There he is. Elf. What if I said, green, round, you love them or you hate them.

What would you say? Okay. Brussels sprouts. There we go. And what if I said, Savior, Messiah, Lord, who would you think of? Jesus in the manger.

There he is. Whose birth really, really, really, really is. Friends. It is good news of great joy for all people.

[15 : 31] This is what we sing, okay? Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings. Mild he lays his glory by, born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.

Hark the herald, angels sing, glory to this new born king. Let me pray. Dear God, thank you for the amazing God that you are.

Thank you so much for Christmas and for sending Jesus into our world and into our lives to save us. And dear Father, I ask that in all the fun that we get to have at Christmas time, that you would help us to delight most of all in him.

And so this is our prayer. Thank you that you do hear us. Because we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.