

Good tidings of great joy

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[0 : 00] Greatest God, we give thanks that we are gathered together here this morning and that we have so much to be thankful for.

Thou hast blessed us on every side. Thou hast given us so many good things. We thank thee, Lord, for our health and strength. We thank thee for food and clothes.

We thank thee for our homes and our loved ones. We thank thee, Lord, for the church. We thank thee for thyself. Especially we give thanks this morning that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

We praise thee for the Saviour. We praise thee that the Lord Jesus Christ freely came into this world, that he said, To do thy will I take delight, O thou my God that art.

We praise thee, Lord, that he took our sins upon himself, that he suffered and he died on Calvary's cross, that he atoned for our sins.

[1 : 15] And on the third day he rose again, victorious and triumphant, having obtained salvation for his people, having opened this new way to heaven, the only way that sinners can get there.

We bless thee that we have a Saviour today who lives, who reigns, who is mighty to save, and is calling unto us and saying, Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Lord our God, we give thanks today that Jesus Christ is on the throne in heaven.

We give thanks that he is inviting us to come and to pray to him. And he is saying, Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.

We praise thee that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming again. For he said to us, Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions.

[2 : 28] If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.

Lord, we bless thee that we have such complete salvation in thee, that although we have sinned against thee, although we have broken thy commandments every day of our lives since we came into this world, although we have come short in so many ways and failed to do so many things that thou hast asked us to do, although we stand as guilty sinners before thee, we praise thee that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.

We praise thee that it stands written in thy word, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Grant, O Lord, that we would put our faith then in Jesus Christ as our Saviour, that we would give our hearts to him and our lives to him, that we would love the Lord with all our heart and soul and strength and mind, and our neighbour as ourself, that we would put our hope and our confidence not in anything that we have done or can do, but that our confidence would totally be in the finished work of Christ, rejoicing in the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.

We pray for thy blessing today to be upon the sick and the suffering and those who are in trouble, those who are in pain and weakness, we pray for them. Those who are grown old and who are distressed in any way, we pray that thou wouldst be near to such.

[4 : 14] Those who cannot be with us today who'd love to be here, we remember them before thee. We think of those who mourn and we pray that thou wouldst comfort them, that thou wouldst support and sustain them.

Put thy loving arms around them and uphold them. Grant, O Lord, thy comfort to them. We pray for those who are going through difficult times, through worries and fears and troubles, through loneliness and distress, through crises of various kinds.

Thou knowest, Lord, the troubles in homes and in families and in workplaces and in individuals' lives. Lord, have mercy upon us. We bless thee that we can come with our troubles to thee.

The God is safe. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known unto God and the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.

Bless our children. Draw them to thyself while they are yet young. Bless us, O Lord, as families and grant that we will be loving families in union and in harmony and in love and fellowship and especially that we will be united in Jesus Christ.

[5 : 27] We pray for thy blessing to be upon all the nations of the world and places where there is war and trouble and turmoil. We pray, Lord, for Bosnia.

We pray for the Caucasian area of the former Soviet Union. We pray, O Lord, for parts of Africa and parts of Asia where there is turmoil and violence and terrorism.

We pray for peace in the Middle East. We praise thee, Lord, for at least the temporary peace in Ireland and pray that it might become a permanent peace. We pray that thou would give wisdom to the leaders of our own country and of the other countries of the world that there might be peace throughout the world.

We pray, Lord, for a peace which is based upon justice and upon righteousness and upon Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. We pray that Jesus would reign over all the kingdoms of the world and that men and women would submit their lives to him and the peace and the joy and the goodwill of God reach to all mankind.

Bless us, Lord, as we wait upon thee here today. Help us to understand the scriptures as we read thy word together. Grant, O Lord, that thou would speak to our souls and that thou would forgive us for our many sins for Jesus' sake.

[6 : 46] Amen. The passage of scripture which we read together the gospel of Luke, chapter 2. And we shall particularly consider this morning verses 10 and 11.

Luke, chapter 2, at verse 10. And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. It's Christmas time.

the children are excited. They love the presents and the party. There's lots of new games and toys and there's plenty of good food.

The older folk, too, appreciate the family gatherings. It's a happy time. Now, of course, there's no proof that Jesus was actually born on Christmas Day.

[8 : 12] In fact, it's very unlikely. Neither are we told that we should celebrate the birth of Christ. Jesus told us that there was something that we should celebrate.

He said, Do this in remembrance of me. for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till he comes.

The one thing that we are particularly encouraged to remember and to celebrate about Jesus' life on earth was in fact his death.

Yet we cannot escape Christmas. It's by far the most important day in the year. And it's interesting that as Britain becomes increasingly more secular and godless, Christmas is becoming bigger and bigger with each passing year.

No doubt there are many reasons for this. There are lots of commercial interests tied up with Christmas. Many people make a lot of money out of Christmas, of course, there are all the industries that are involved in providing special Christmassy things.

[9 : 34] Christmas cards, Christmas decorations and so on. But then there are so many other industries that are involved in preparing food or preparing presents or whatever and Christmas is very important economically.

And sadly today we find that we have a country that sees economics as more important than anything else. But then too, no doubt, there's the pleasure of Christmas and the pleasure which it gives which makes it a very special day.

And perhaps too, the influence of Roman Catholicism is increasing and Christmas and Christmas or Christ Mass, that sort of idea. No doubt also there's a conscience in many people, a troubled conscience, a guilty conscience.

Many people have a guilty conscience that they are neglecting their family. and so they have a special family time at Christmas to make up for all the neglect of the past year.

Maybe too, people have a guilty conscience with regard to God and sometimes you'll find that people will go to church at Christmas when they won't go to church at any other time of the year.

[11 : 06] They feel well, at Christmas time we can make up for how we have gone wrong at other times. And what is Christmas all about? They say, well, a saviour is born, so all will be fine.

A saviour was born into the world, so we've got nothing to worry about. We'll do some good deeds at Christmas time and God will be happy with us. Sadly, in the midst of all the sentimentalism and confusion the gospel message is often missed.

I would like us today to take a look at a little of what the Bible says about the birth of Christ and to seek that the Lord will bless that to us as we consider it together.

Because at the end of the day, the Bible is our only rule, our only guide. And the Bible brings us face to face with God.

The God who made us, the God who rules over us, the God who will judge us, and the God who alone can save us.

[12 : 25] If he doesn't save us, we'll be lost forever. The God whom we need to know, and the Jesus Christ who is God's son, who is the only savior.

First, a miserable world. That's the kind of world that Jesus came into. At the time, the Roman army occupied Palestine.

Wherever you turned, you would find the Roman legions. Pilate and other governors like him ruled in Jerusalem. Jerusalem. And the Jews were forced to go to their native towns and villages for a census, a census which was connected with taxing.

It was very inconvenient for Mary to go to Bethlehem. The long journey from Nazareth and Galilee in the north, all the way down to Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem.

Very inconvenient at that stage when she was heavily pregnant. And yet, the law said it and she had to do it. They arrive in Bethlehem and they're just a poor couple.

[13 : 48] They don't have much money and the inn is crowded. There's no room for them in the inn. And so, they move into the stable and there, Jesus is born and laid in a manger.

Jesus was poorer than any of us. There's nobody here who was born in a cow shed. And there's nobody here whose first cradle was a manger.

a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

we look around us today in the world in which we live and we see plenty of misery and plenty of trouble.

We see some poor people for whom Christmas is a burden and a worry and a trouble. They've got no money to give presents to those that they would like to give presents to.

[14 : 57] They've got no money to buy special food at Christmas time. And they feel it. They have poverty. Perhaps they're unemployed. They feel it particularly at Christmas time when others are spending so much money.

But if there are poor people in this country, how much more in some other countries? There are some people today who have nothing to eat. Some people, many, many people and all they have to eat is a handful of rice.

poverty, malnutrition and suffering. A miserable world. How many people there are at Christmas time who are particularly aware of a bereavement that has happened in the past year?

At the Christmas meal they're looking at that empty chair which reminds them of a loved one who's no longer there. how many people at Christmas time are sick in hospital or perhaps in pain and weakness?

How many at Christmas time are wondering will they see another Christmas? A miserable world. A world of sickness, of suffering and of death.

[16 : 20] How many people there are with broken homes and they think back to the romantic days, the days of love, the days when they said, till death has to part.

And now somebody else has come in and broken the relationship or something has happened and the one they've loved has walked out on them and they're alone and they feel that bereavement terribly, that rejection.

perhaps they think of their children, maybe there's been a problem there and they think of that little child that they gave birth to, that they washed and clothed and fed and the nasty things that child now says to them and how that child has turned his or her back upon them.

Broken homes, broken families, broken lives, how many people there are who are lonely at Christmas time, friendless, looking around a cheerless room on their own, how many people and their lives are broken by drink and by drugs, they hate the stuff and yet they're addicted to it, how many families are in terror of their lives perhaps at this time, or in stress and strain and in poverty because of drink and drugs, a miserable world, but a world particularly that is miserable because of sin and guilty conscience, awareness that things are wrong in their own life, between them and God, a fear of death, a wrath of death, of judgment and of hell, a miserable world, and behind all that misery is sin, sometimes we can see the connection between the sin and the misery, as in the cases of crime and violence, others, but other times it's not so clear, and yet we go right back in the world's history to the beginning, and there we see that God created the world, he made it perfect, everything was good, everything was beautiful, everything was in harmony, everything was happy,

God's world, and Adam and Eve were happy in the paradise, in the heaven, that God gave them there, and then sin came in, and with sin came misery, pain and suffering and trouble and death and hell, and all of us sin, there's not one person here but sins, we sin in thought and word and indeed we sin in anger, bad temper, pride, jealousy, spitefulness, deceitfulness, envy, lust, we sin in thanklessness to God, prayerlessness to him, in not worshipping him as we ought, in not loving him as we should, in not serving him with the enthusiasm and dedication with which we should, and the

[20 : 05] Bible tells us the wages of sin is death, a miserable, sinful, cursed world, the world that Christ came into, and the world that we see around us today, and the world, perhaps, that is in your heart, but in the second place, there's good news, the angel appears, and brings good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, think of the shepherds out there in the field, they were poor people, despised people, rejected by many, and looked down on these shepherds out in the field, but God doesn't despise them, God doesn't despise anyone, that's the kind of

God we have, a God who is no respecter of persons, and a God who is gracious and merciful, particularly to those whom this world looks down upon.

the angel appears to the shepherds and says, I bring you good tidings. There's so much bad news in the world, but I bring you good tidings.

I bring you gospel. The meaning of the word gospel is simply glad tidings. here in the midst of a joyless world, I bring you great joy.

In a world full of violence and struggle and warfare and pain and quarrelling, I bring you peace, peace on earth, peace and goodwill toward men.

[22 : 10] What is this message that the angel was bringing? First, it was the promised one. The promised one has come, the one of whom Adam, the one that was promised to Adam.

You remember how Adam and Eve were thrown out of the garden of Eden and God said to them, one day a child will be born, the seed of the woman, that shall destroy that serpent, the devil.

God and the promised one has come, the one of whom God spoke to Abraham, in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

promised. The one who was promised through the prophets, through Isaiah, his name shall be wonderful, counselor, almighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

The one for whom the Israelites down through the Old Testament were longing. You remember Simeon in the temple, when he sees Jesus, he says, says to God, now let us, thou thy servant, depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.

[23 : 40] Now I can die happy, because I have seen with my own eyes the Messiah. He saw the little baby, and he rejoiced.

the promised one has come, the saviour of the world. Rejoice because of the amazing condescension of God, that the second person of the Holy Trinity has come into this world, that God has become man, the word was made flesh, the Lord of glory born in a stable, the creator of the universe, conceived in the womb of a woman.

Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. How wonderful, how glorious, that God should become man.

A saviour born, one to bear away our sins, his name shall be called Jesus, for he shall take away our sins.

Born into this world, and why was he born? Born to die, born to suffer, and to offer himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice.

[25 : 14] Born to pay the ransom for our sins, for our sins, to atone, to pacify the justice of a holy God. Good news, glad tidings of great joy, Christ the Lord has come into this world.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. peace on earth, peace for those who are children of wrath, peace for the sinner, for the criminal, for the condemned, peace through Jesus Christ, and good will.

Good will for those with whom God naturally would be angry because of their sins, but good will because of Jesus Christ.

a miserable world, but the angels announce good news. A Saviour is born.

And then in the third place, for whom is this good news? To you shepherds is good news. A Saviour is born, but it's not just for the shepherds, it's to all people, which shall be to all people, unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.

[26 : 53] Good news for the miserable, for those who are suffering, for those who are in pain, for those who are grieving, for those who are in poverty, there's good news.

A Saviour who will enable you to cope, a Saviour who will bring good out of evil, a Saviour who will enable you to rejoice in the midst of your sufferings, a Saviour who will be companion to you in your loneliness, who will be a friend to you in your friendlessness, the miserable.

There is a comforter, there is a Saviour, there is one who transforms your life and who will give you peace and joy and contentment.

good news for the miserable but good news also for the guilty and the fearful. As we said, sin is behind all the misery that is in the world and every one of us are sinners and sin demands the punishment of God and the sinner shall not go unpunished.

But there's a Saviour, there is hope, there is one who has come into this world to seek and to save that which was lost.

[28 : 15] There is one who says to us, to every one of us today, come to me, believe on me, trust in me, receive me and you will receive salvation.

Pray to me and I will answer you. Come and I will give you life, life with a capital L, life that is eternal, blessed life.

A message, yes, for the miserable, a message for the guilty, for the fearful, a message of joy and peace, great joy and lasting peace.

People receive, yes, they get happiness and joy out of the pleasures that are normally associated with Christmas. The food and the presents and the family around, all these things bring joy and yet these joys are so short and they soon pass.

And the best of presents that we get, they fade, they pass away, they lose their usefulness. joy, but here is one who gives us great joy, lasting joy, eternal joy, freely offered to every one of us.

[29 : 47] Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

He was in the world and the world was made by him and the world knew him not. He came unto his own and his own received him not.

But as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God even to them that believe on his name.

Are you one of those who believe on his name, who receive him, who have received the power to become a son and a daughter to God? Do you know something of what this passage is talking about?

Joy. Not a passing laugh, but a deep and inner joy. do you know peace or do you have worry and trouble in your life and fear and doubt and uncertainty?

[31 : 01] Are you afraid of life, afraid of the future, afraid of death, afraid of eternity, or do you know the peace that God gives?

glad tidings of great joy. Great joy to everyone who receives this Christ.

But what about those who don't? There are lots of people celebrating Christmas, lots and lots of people across the world who rejoice in the birth of Jesus.

And I wonder what will happen when they die. Will they go to heaven to be with Jesus? Or will they go to hell, cast out of his presence?

The fact that Jesus has come into the world makes us doubly guilty. if we're not Christians, if we don't fully receive Christ and trust in him.

[32 : 16] It's wonderful that there is a saviour. If there was no saviour, well, we would still be guilty as sinners. But isn't our guilt so very, very much more?

Because God went to the bother of coming into this world. And went to the pain and suffering of the cross. And yet, so many in this world will rejoice in him in a trivial sort of way, but will not receive him deeply and thoroughly and love him and follow him.

How shall we escape? How can we possibly escape if we neglect so great salvation? salvation? Is it not mocking God to make a great thing of the birth of Christ and to be so happy about the birth of Jesus?

Because then we live a life that is in complete contradiction with what Jesus taught us. how can we be happy at Christmas if we are still keeping Christ out of our hearts and lives?

He says, behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in with him and eat with him and he with me.

[33 : 53] Are you still keeping him locked out of your own heart and life? Or have you opened your heart to Jesus? Do you have a personal relationship with him?

Is he living in your life and filling you with peace and with joy and with a deep inner satisfaction? what a wonderful thing it would be if this Christmas was the day when Jesus Christ was born in your heart.

That's what you need. And that's what this world needs. And that's what changes a miserable world into a happy one and a blessed one.

Let us pray. O Lord our God we thank thee that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

And as sinners who have been sinners all the days of our life we rejoice that there is a saviour that although we cannot earn our salvation by good work Christ earned it for us and freely offers it to us.

[35 : 11] And we pray that thou would enable us then to receive Jesus Christ into our hearts and lives. Grant O Lord that we would be followers of Jesus and walk with him and live with him and have his peace and his presence in our hearts.

For Jesus sake. Amen.