

1. Jesus is ... the Incarnation of Love

Luke 1. 26 – 35

A classic start to our Christmas readings -
The angel Gabriel announces to Mary
that she is to bear a child - God's Child -
and she is to name him "Jesus".

And as with all these familiar stories
I want us to remember that they were not familiar
when they were first told -
when they first happened.

For Mary this is a surprise - not half!

1. Mary is "chosen" above all others
2. The Messiah is to be born
3. It will be an abnormal birth - no father!
only his Father in heaven.

"He will be called the Son of God."

Of course today we are looking at
Jesus - not Mary
but we can't let this story pass
without making the point -
God's plan involved human involvement
God asked permission of Mary
and Mary said "Yes".

And that makes its claims on us.
God asks us for our involvement
and waits for our "Yes"

But about Jesus - Jesus is "the Incarnation of Love"

Incarnation - because he took flesh
he became a human being -
don't diminish that in any way
For the Son of God to be born as a man
is astounding - and exceedingly costly for God,

Why did God chose this way - because there was
no other way that would work
we are talking about salvation - atonement for sin.
And for God to side-step this issue
would leave the world in sin for eternity,
and God loves us too much for that.

God became incarnate in Jesus
a path that led to the cross
because he has love for us
which is self-sacrificial.

God's love is of an infinitely higher degree
than our love.

Let the Christmas story remind you
not of our fallible human love,
but of God's perfect love,
as he invites our response
of worship and obedient commitment.

And as, with Mary, we say "yes" again to God,
we will be doing our part
in making Christmas real for the world today.

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2. Jesus is ... the Promised One of Israel

Luke 2. 1 – 7

The familiar story moves on -
The census - the trip to Bethlehem -
no room in the inn - the baby in the manger.

A Christmas Card picture -
It is all very sweet - No it isn't!

Maybe we would like to place our babies
in a wooden crib - like the manger.
But I am sure that you would clean it out first -
no smelly straw soaked in cow-lick.
And Joseph the carpenter, father to this child,
would have smoothed off the rough wood,
maybe even sealed it in some way.
But he had no opportunity.

No nice preparation for the birth of Jesus -
Jesus had to take what was there.

Just as the world was not cleaned up for him
he took us and our world
in darkness and sin, as it still is.

Why - because God had made a promise.

All through Israel's history
because of their failure to live as God's people
their kings, their prophets, their priests failed,
as do our leaders today at every level.
Our politicians do not live up to our ideals any more.

They don't even give the appearance any more.

People today are short of good leadership -
leaders who are examples of goodness -
just as they were in Bible times.

So God made a promise, which he repeated often.
Because - you do not have good shepherds
because - you do not have good leaders

I myself will come ...

An anointed servant - God himself -
two strands of prophecy fulfilled in Jesus -
he is the Promised One of Israel.
God's anointed, God's Son.

But it doesn't look right!
A new King - in the Royal City of Bethlehem,
but born in a stable - dirty, cold, and lonely.

But God is going to make a wonderful story
out of this puzzling beginning.

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3. Jesus is ... the Light of God's Glory

Isaiah 9. 2, 6 – 7

Our only bit of Old Testament tonight
but it describes Isaiah's world (700 yrs before Jesus)
and it describes ours.

*a people walking in darkness,
those living in the land
of the shadow of death.*

Oh dear - bad words - "Shadow of Death"
Christmas should be about nice things.

No it is not.

Christmas is the birth of a Saviour
a saviour saves - from something!
From something bad.

I won't list all the bad stuff in the world.
Read your papers - listen to the News
there are lots of hurt people, broken and sad.
Our world is in darkness.

The previous verse in Isaiah
describes the godlessness
of the people in Isaiah's time.
Just like our time - a dark world
And so God sends Jesus to be light.

But not just any light.
(Sounds like the Marks and Spencer advert!)

What Jesus reveals is God's goodness.
Jesus is the Light of God's Glory.

When we see Jesus - we see God.
He said so.

And it is not a common sight
in our world these days.
We live in a dark world.

But - get excited - cheer -
because Jesus is Light in this world.
and these wonderful titles for him

*Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

How much we need these things in our world today.

We hear this every year
but it is still beyond our understanding.

God's answer to every problem.

But it is a wonderful message,
and it gladdens our hearts.

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4. Jesus is ... the Dawn of God's Grace

Luke 2. 8 – 14

The Shepherds and the Angels.

The angels are excited - they are cheering -
in their angelic choir sort of way.

Glory to God in the highest ...

This announcement, this news

Today, in the City of David ...

is the best news ever.

a Saviour has been born ...

... to you.

Ever since people made mistakes
ever since people made decisions to do wrong
and that is since the dawn of the human race,
the world has been plunging down
deeper into darkness.

Now it is a new dawn - of grace.

Grace is God not giving us what we deserve

but giving us what we do not deserve -

forgiveness - imputed righteousness.

Not our own righteousness, but his - placed upon us.

The message is -

A Saviour has been born to you - today.

A holy night indeed!

A night to send shivers up and down our spines.

God is drawing near!

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5. Jesus is ... the Expression of God's Being

Luke 2. 15 – 20

The Shepherds - found it all as the angel had said.

Prophecy - prediction - is fulfilled.

And so you trust the rest of the message.

"What they said is true - what else did they say?"

This is not just a baby - and that is miracle enough

(those of you who have seen and held

a new-born baby.

But in this baby, they meet with God.

I don't know if you know what it is like

to know you are in the presence of God.

It is awesome!

When they entered the stable

they would have been struck with awe!

The saints in heaven fall down in the presence of God.

The Shepherds wouldn't need to be told.

They knew this was God's Son.

And not just knelt before him in worship -

they had to go and tell.

The angel said, Go and see. Now they must Go and tell.

So should we!

God's promised rescue of the human race - has begun!

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We can move from darkness to light, from death to life
We can be born again, born of God.

All we have to do is receive Jesus,
and believe in his name.
But so many chose not to.

Do you notice the rash of stories every year
about the rejection of Christmas.

Various Local Authorities have banned Christmas Trees
or the exchange of Christmas Greetings by their employees.

In some places to celebrate
"Winterval" not Christmas
and any celebration has to include
all the other faiths as well.

They want the seasonal peace and good-will -
but without Jesus. And you can't have it.

We celebrate at this time
all the things Jesus stood for -
the value of the individual person
especially the outcast and despised.
Forgiveness not retribution.
Family and society, not individualism

We celebrate thwe reaching out to us
of a God who wants children, not servants.
Who **invites** obedience, but doesn't impose it.

It is Jesus - who is God's chosen expression of himself.
his Word, his Light, His very Being.

It is not a question of choice -
"Which religion or faith do I find attractive?"
It is a question of fact - which one is true?

The Christmas story reminds us
that God stepped into his world in flesh.

Whether we like it or not, it is truth.
And it we trust in that truth - it works.

Sinners can be forgiven.
I think that is extremely good news.

The unlovely - become loved.
The sorrowful and broken-hearted - find joy.
The fearful and the troubled find peace.

Love, Joy, Peace, Hope.
These are the things of Christmas.
These are the things of Jesus.
There is no happier message. This is the best!

Let us try to be worthy of that precious gift.
The birth of a Saviour - Jesus
for you and for me.

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