

Christmas Service

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Date: 25 December 2005

Preacher: W.D. Graham

- [0 : 00] To magnify and bless, bless O my soul, the Lord thy God, and not forgetful be of all his gracious benefits he hath bestowed on thee.
- Psalm 103 verses 1 to 5, the tune is Kilmarnock. O thou my soul, bless God the Lord. O thou my soul, bless God the Lord, and not forgetful be of all his grace.
- Be of all his holy days, to magnify and bless.
- I would like us now to turn together to the second reading that we had in the Gospel by John in chapter 1.
- And to look there first of all at verse number 14. Also we'll be looking at one or two other verses, both in John's Gospel and then finally in 2 Corinthians chapter 9.
- [1 : 40] But looking first of all then at John's Gospel in chapter 1 at verse 14, where we read at the beginning of the verse, The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
- The Word became flesh. I suppose in the run-up to Christmas time, we tend to make all sorts of huffs and puffs, as it were, and tut-tuts about Christmas and the commercialisation of Christmas.
- And some people may feel that the very fact of celebrating Christmas at all is a bit off, so to speak.
- And yet, I'm equally sure that we all celebrate it in one way or another.
- We acknowledge it, and I'm sure that most of us at least will be eating very well as a result of it today.
- [3 : 09] As far as the calendar date is concerned, there may be indeed little direct evidence for the birth of Jesus being at this particular time of year.
- And certainly, the calendar which purports to date from the birth of Jesus doesn't accurately reflect the year in which he was born.
- It is probably five years or seven years out of date, as it were, with Jesus. As most people acknowledge now, having been born maybe in the year five or the year seven B.C., if that's not a strange way of putting it.
- But the fact is that Jesus was born, And that is cause for celebration, for thankfulness.
- And don't let us forget this. It is a cause for wonder.
- [4 : 39] The shepherds were amazed. And no wonder that they were amazed.
- The old hymn expresses it so well as it throws up for us the amazing contrast surrounding the person and the birth of Christ.
- When it reads, Child in a manger, Infant of Mary, Outcast and stranger, Lord of all.
- It is a cause for wonder. And what I want to do at this time is quite simply to link up certain well-known verses in the Gospel and then in 2 Corinthians.
- Verses in connection with the coming into the world of Jesus Christ and to reflect on what this means for each one of us today.

[5 : 58] We read here in John chapter 1 and verse 14 that the Word became flesh. We've grown, I think, very used to reading the first chapter of John and it may be because of the frequency with which the passage is read that we perhaps have lost a sense of wonder at what the Apostle is really saying to us in these words.

The Word became flesh. The Word speaks of a message.

It is a divine message. For we read that the Word was with God. The Word was God.

And now the Word became, that's a significant word, the Word became flesh.

This divine message has become human in order to communicate with us humans.

[7 : 36] He has come in the form of a person just like you and like me. Now in the context of John's Gospel, this is John's most emphatic way of telling us that Jesus Christ who is, of course, the Word he refers to here, that he is both very God, that is truly God, and also very human.

A real person, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, so that the baby who was cradled in a manger in Bethlehem is a real baby and is also really Lord of all.

And that is amazing. So never let us lose the sense of wonder that is encapsulated in that tiny body in the manger of Bethlehem.

That in him, as the Apostle says, was the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form.

Something that I hope we will look at more directly this evening. And the baby came as God's message, God's Word to all men.

[9 : 39] men. And that takes us to a second verse in John's Gospel, which explains the message.

It is that well-known verse in chapter 3 and verse 16, where we read the message.

And it is this, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Here then is the reason for the Word becoming flesh, because God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.

[10 : 57] And here in the person of Christ in the manger, and in the words of this message in John 3 and 16, there is displayed for us in all the glory that filled the sky around the shepherds that night in the fields when Jesus was born, displayed the greatness of the love of God, God.

The immeasurable greatness of the love of God, as the theologian B.B.

Warfield puts it in a wonderful sermon on the text John 3 and 16, which is something that if you have the opportunity everyone should read.

And he goes on to say, God's love for the world, God loves the world, the world that is so bad that it takes a great kind of love to love it at all, and much more so to love it as God has loved it when he gave his son for it.

love. In the coming of Jesus Christ into our world, we have, in the striking words in which Warfield goes on to finish his sermon, a vision, he says, of the consummated purpose of the immeasurable love of God.

[12 : 46] Now, we can speak in such terms, terms of wonder, of astonishment, because of the way in which John describes for us the message from God.

He loves the world. Now, in John's Gospel, when John uses the word world, it represents for him all that is anti-God.

The whole world lies in wickedness. It has become a disordered world.

in the grip of the evil one, as John tells us in his first epistle in chapter five. And you don't get that side of things on Christmas cards, but that's the reality of the world into which Jesus came, into which God sent his special gift, his great message, his own beloved son.

And he sent this message in the person of Christ, his son, in order to save the world, to redeem it from that lostness, to cleanse it from the awful sinfulness, that has corrupted the world, that he made, and he made good and perfect at its beginning.

[14 : 51] He sent Jesus to redeem the lost and sinful people, as it tells us here in verse 17 of John 3, for God did not send his world, his son, into the world, to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

It's no wonder then that the angel said to the shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem on the night in which Jesus was born, don't be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy, that will be for all people.

Good news, that word is the evangel. And we are told that in the ancient world, an evangel, good news as it is translated for us, an evangel was something that always announced the birth of an important personage, or else it marked the birthday, say, of an emperor, or someone outstanding like that.

I bring you good news, it is announcing the birth of the most outstanding personage ever to have come into our world, Jesus, born as a baby, in order to redeem a lost and sinful people.

It's no wonder, as I say, that the angels were thrilled to announce such an evangel at that particular time.

[16 : 54] But that brings me to another verse. And it's a verse that speaks to us about a reaction.

How are we going to react to the birth of Jesus? If you turn your Bibles over to 2 Corinthians in chapter 9 and verse 15, you'll find there these words at the end of the chapter 9 in which the apostle has been speaking to us about giving, about giving generously or otherwise and receiving the results of our giving.

But the last verse of that chapter says these words, thanks be to God for his indescribable gift.

So what then is to be our response to the word who has come in to our world, bringing the message from God, a message of grace and of love, which God has sent to us in the person of Christ.

Christ. In this verse in 2 Corinthians, I think we have the best response that we could ever give. Thanksgiving to God for his indescribable gift.

[18 : 38] Now I'm sure that most of us today have received gifts of one kind or another and at least some of them, if not all of them, will have caused us great joy.

We wouldn't be saying, oh, not socks again, or not more hankies or something like that, but gifts that thrill us when we receive them.

Well, how are we going to respond to God's gift of Christ? I hope it will be in the words of this verse, thanks be to God for his gift, too precious or too wonderful for words.

There are people to whom you may mention Christ, the gospel, God's giving of his son, and it just leaves them cold.

People who perhaps may make a great fuss around Christmas time and yet for the rest of the year Christ doesn't figure in their thinking whatsoever.

[20 : 07] People who give gifts and when you might ask them why do you give gifts? What's the origin of this?

Has it anything to do with Jesus? It would just turn them off. But in this passage that Paul is speaking of that Paul finishes with these wonderful words in verse 15, he's been writing about giving, he's been writing about giving to the Lord's work, to help the poor, to help the needy, to maintain the work of the church.

And it reminds us that all of our giving has to be seen in the light of God's giving to us.

he gave his own beloved son, a gift that the apostle says is an indescribable gift, a gift too wonderful for words.

Martin Luther wrote a poem made into a hymn and it has been translated in this particular way.

[21 : 34] My heart for very joy doth leap, my lips no more their silence keep, I too must sing with joyful tongue that sweetest ancient cradle song, glory to God in the highest heaven, who unto man his son has given, while angels sing with pious mirth, a glad new year to all the earth.

And I trust that we can all say amen to that with a loser because of what Christ means to us.

Does it really mean for us an offering of thanksgiving to God? Well, that will mean more than just a pleasant feeling and a hearty song.

It must be reflected surely in the way that we live, not just on Christmas Day, but on every day, at making it like what Luther speaks of as a glad new year for us so that each day we live will be to the honor and the glory of God.

In gratitude for what we have received from him, gifts of grace, forgiveness and love, and then in return giving him the obedience and service and love of our hearts in whatever situation he places us.

[23 : 26] So, friends, I hope that you have a most pleasant day today and a happy day too with family and friends if that's where you'll be.

And above all, I pray that you'll have the joy of the Lord's presence with you today and all the days to come that it will be a gift of grace from the Lord with Christ, his indescribable gift.

Amen. Shall we pray together? Dear Lord, we do thank you again for the coming of Christ into our world.

And we pray that as we go through this day, Jesus may be in our thoughts, in our company, in our hearts, and that in all the days ahead that he gives us, may we live in the light of his gift to us of grace and forgiveness and love.

We ask it in his name and for his sake. Amen. Amen. And now let us conclude our service by singing to God's praise in Psalm number 34 in the Sing Psalms.

[25 : 05] That's on page number 40. Psalm number 34, the tune is St. Stephen, and we'll sing from verse 8, from verse 8 as far as verse 14.

Come, taste and see, the Lord is good, who trusts in him is blessed. O fear the Lord, you saints, with need you will not be oppressed.

And we'll sing on from verse number 8 as far as verse 14, the tune St. Stephen, come, taste and see, the Lord is good. Amen. Amen.

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The Lord will wait. The Lord will die.

[27 : 01] The Lord will die.

The Lord will die.

The Lord will die.

The Lord will die.

The Lord will die.

[29 : 31] With mercy and peace from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest on and abide with us and with all whom we love this day and forevermore. Amen.