



## Sermon

### ***What are We Celebrating?***

**Isaiah 9:1-2, 6-7; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:8-20**

Christmas Day, 2018

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Do you like Christmas? I do! I like a traditional Xmas dinner. I especially like Xmas pudding with Brandy Butter. Some people aren't familiar with brandy butter – well it is yummy! Yum – no super-yummy! In the past, my brother-in-law and another family friend would pretend to clutch the bowl to themselves and keep it from everyone else with mock earnest competition and selfishness.

I used to make BB from the recipe my mother had which specified 2 tablespoons of brandy with the 4oz of butter and 2oz sugar etc. When Helen started making she said, just keep adding brandy until the butter and sugar won't absorb anymore! It is even more wonderful!!!

One year, my mother, wife and sister blithely announced after the main course that they decided to have fruit salad and not Christmas pudding! At first, I thought it was a joke in poor taste, then very poor taste when they insisted. Finally I realized they were serious. That idea has never been repeated I can tell you!

But for all the enjoyment of Christmas dinner whether you have a traditional meal or a barbeque or picnic; for all the enjoyment of present giving and receiving – these are only a form of celebration not the thing itself.

We make a big thing of Christmas for a big reason –something important happened. If we forget the thing itself, the celebration becomes meaningless and so we drift away from it all.

Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth but that is only worth celebrating if he makes a difference to our lives. What do our readings tell us?

The gospel reading from Luke tells us of the birth of Jesus. His parents have gone to Bethlehem because of a government decree and there the baby was born. We know something of the back story but for those in and around the town, for those shepherds in the fields outside Bethlehem they were taken by surprise by an announcement.

The shepherds were out in the fields looking after their flocks. This is a photo of the fields outside Bethlehem where they are understood to have been. Those shepherds were raising flocks which were particularly intended to provide sheep for the temple sacrifices in Jerusalem which is not so far away. They reported on that night, that angels appeared to them. They were told that the long promised

Messiah, the descendent of King David had been born in their town. This baby was to be the Saviour yet he would be found lying in an animal's feed trough like a peasant child.

We celebrate the coming of the one whose birth was announced to poor and despised shepherds by angels appearing in glory! We celebrate the coming of the Anointed Son of David who is the Saviour.

In Matthew's account of Jesus' birth he tells us about Mary's husband's experience. Joseph had learnt that his fiancée was pregnant and knowing the child was not his, he was planning to break off the engagement. However, he had a dream in which an angel said to him, ""Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." <sup>1</sup>

Joseph was told that to call the baby, Jesus which means, "God saves," because this child would be the Saviour from sin.

We celebrate the birth of one who saves us from our sins.

The prophet Isaiah wrote many prophecies about the one who was to come, the Messiah. We about the promise of a child who would be born who would live in Galilee (Northern Israel, where Jesus grew up and spent much of his time in ministry). That child would be a light for those in darkness, life for those oppressed by death. Jesus later said that he is the light of the world.

Isaiah told of this child who would have the titles: Wonderful Counsellor and Prince of Peace. He would reign on David's throne with a good and righteous rule. So was this to be a local Jewish king? Wait! His government and peace would be without end, forever and ever!

Wait! He is also the Mighty God and Everlasting Father. Isaiah is making the astounding claim that a boy child would be born who would be God in a body and who would rule justly.

When Jesus was a man and taught and ministered, died and rose to life again, he made astonishing claims – claims to be one with Almighty God. Those early followers were convinced that these claims were true. Those of us today who have come to follow Jesus as our Lord – we say Jesus is indeed the Mighty God.

We celebrate the birth of the Son of God – who is God with us.

The Epistle reading summarises the outworking of the one who is God with us to bring salvation.

The verse before our reading sets out in bold headline form the problem of humanity. Problems we see writ large in our society, perhaps in our families, perhaps in ourselves.

<sup>v3</sup> At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

Does that sound familiar? Can we see how people slaves of pleasures and passions? Can we see how easily we are too? Can we acknowledge our own foolishness, disobedience to the wise ways of God, the times when we are deceived into believing harmful ways are good and good ways are intolerable?

This is the need for salvation. How is it possible to get out of it? Into that dilemma, into that trap, into that despair, God sent an answer. God offers salvation for those who will respond by rescuing us from our bondage and changing us into new people.

The source of salvation is found in God alone. It is because of his kindness and love, his mercy and grace, that he intervened and sent a saviour to rescue us. This saviour was Jesus. He appeared at his

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 1:20-21

birth, he gave himself for our redemption. The basis for salvation is not that we earn it but that Christ died for our sins on the cross.

When we come to Christ for salvation, we are washed of our sins and given new life by the Holy Spirit. When we come to Christ for salvation we are justified by his grace - that is, God declares that we have a new status before him: instead of being guilty of sin, we are declared innocent because Jesus has carried our sin to death on the cross.

Finally, Paul says we become heirs having the hope of eternal life. With relationship restored with God, we are adopted as heirs and have the sure expectation of the glorious, eternal life. In this life, as Christians we have a foretaste of that life – then we will have the fullness of our inheritance.

The sentence after our reading is significant. Paul writes, “This is a trustworthy saying.” All he wrote he thought was worthwhile, but he emphasises it here – you can put your trust in this.

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of God with us, come to save us. At Christmas, we celebrate the fact that God has worked salvation for us through his Son.

And that is far more important than BB, feasts, presents or toys. It is life!

God bless you this Christmas with a true celebration of the birth of God with us, Emmanuel – may he indeed be your Saviour and mine.