

The Light of the World

SERMON

Over the years I have found that ministers will often start their short 'Carol Service sermon' by asking if we are ready for Christmas. So...

Are you ready for Christmas?

Christmas can be so stressful can't it? Not to mention expensive! After the Christmas presents have been bought, after the festivities, partying, excessive food, too much drink, visits to post-Christmas sale rooms to buy things that no-one really needs; when there is no more to be done, all that is left for some people are excessive bills that cannot be paid; the cold weather, and seemingly nothing to look forward to until the summer arrives. It is tragic to hear that some people chose to end their lives because of this frightening and hopeless scenario.

How much more is God saddened by such tragedies?

In the last reading, we heard the apostle John, say that 'Jesus is the Light of the World'. His actual words, written down by the 17th century Bible translators, were Jesus '***was the true light which gives light to every man...***'

If people will just turn to Jesus and believe He is who He says He is – **God incarnate, the creator of the universe made man**, or '***The Word made flesh***' as John defines Him in the last reading - then His light will shine on each of us.

His light of love, protection, provision.

His light will illuminate his Word so that we can understand and obey what the Bible says, and enjoy a life full of promise, whatever our circumstances.

Later in chapter 10 and verse 10 of his Gospel, the apostle John quotes Jesus as saying '***I have come that they (those who follow Him) may have life and that they may have it more abundantly***' or '***have it to the full***' as another more modern translation says.

If you believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God, His promise to you today is that you may enjoy life to the full. He doesn't make that promise to people of the world (i.e. unbelievers). In the context of John 10 verse 10, His promise is to

'His sheep' as He calls them: these are God-fearing, Bible believing, born-again followers of Christ, whether Jew or gentile.

But as we also heard in the last reading, it says **'He was in the world, but the world did not know Him'** and it says **'He came to His own and His own did not receive Him.'**

Jesus came originally to give the message of salvation to the Jewish people.

He then turned also to the Gentiles to give them the same message. What we read in the Bible is that many Jews and many people of the world – the gentiles - chose not to receive Him or know Him. They turned instead to the darkness (the ways of the evil one) and the apostle John says **"the darkness does not comprehend Him."**

The same is clearly true today. Sadly it is a fact that many of the Jews and also the Gentiles will not turn to the Messiah, the Christ, Jesus the only Son of God!

Those who reject Jesus Christ as the Messiah find the darkness or the pleasures of this world more attractive and exciting, but these things do not fill the emptiness in their souls, and so they immerse themselves into more darkness, hoping to find something that will permanently satisfy their longing.

As we know, those who trust and believe in Jesus Christ have a hope that is unwavering.

Let us examine our own hearts. Are we living in the light or in the darkness?

When the Archangel Gabriel said to a young virgin 2,000 years ago (my paraphrasing) 'you will have a Baby and He will be the Son of God' – her faith was unwavering. She said: 'Yes!'

Mary knew, in the natural, such a promise was impossible to fulfil, but she also knew that with God all things are possible. And that is a truth we can all hold onto. All things are possible with God. Whatever our difficulties may be, Jesus Christ is the solution.

The Christmas story – a story we all know so well – begins with a miracle. The miracle of a virgin birth.

The story of the life of Jesus is **filled** with miracles - casting out demons, feeding 5000 hungry people with just a few loaves and fishes, healing the sick, calming the storm, bringing back people from the dead, and the culmination of His life and indeed His purpose here on Earth, through His death, resurrection and ascension into Heaven and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Whilst it is important for followers of Christ to reflect upon the miracle of His birth, which the Church does at this time of the year, the celebration of the miracle of Easter is, in my opinion and that of other Christians, infinitely more important than celebrating His birth at Christmas.

Because of the importance of the true meaning of Easter, I want to end my short Christmas reflection to tell you once again about Easter. I imagine this will be the earliest Easter message you will have received – four months earlier than normal. Let just say it's my equivalent to the shop that puts out Christmas cards to sell in early August!

You see, Satan is quite happy for us to enjoy Christmas – so long as we take Christ out of it. Partying, presents, mistletoe and wine – Satan and his demons are absolutely fine with that. BUT – if you celebrate Christ's birth (which we do at Christmas) and what's more, His death and resurrection (which we do at Easter), the powers of darkness are most perturbed!

Their plan is to do everything in their power to ensure we forget why God had to come in the flesh as a man and die in our place. And of course, the reason God had to do that, is because of 'sin'.

In preparing this short talk, which I did at The Priory in Carisbrooke, I read on the wall of my quiet room a small leaflet prepared by the 'Lydia Fellowship International'.

It listed four Bible verses all taken from Paul's letter to the Romans and it was entitled 'God's Way of Salvation.'

It is the Gospel in four verses, and it talks about sin.

These are the four verses:

Romans 3 v 23 - ***'For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God'***.

Romans 5 v 8 – ***'But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us'***.

Romans 6 v 23 – ***'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord'***.

Romans 10 v 9 – ***'If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.'***

Now that **is** GOOD News! But, note this: There is no mention of Christmas in that summary of the Gospel. BUT, in those four short verses, sin is mentioned three times and the Easter message twice.

This Christmas, my prayer is that each of us will spend some time quietly with God reflecting on what Christmas is really about.

Enjoy the presents, family fellowship, turkey and the trimmings and all of the rest of it, by all means, but take time out to recall why God became man.

He left His holy kingdom of righteousness and came down from the glory of Heaven to spend 33 years here in the temporary domain of the devil, telling mankind of the way of salvation through faith in Him, and then paying the ultimate sacrifice of dying in our place in order that we might be forgiven of our sins and made right with God when we turn to Jesus and put our faith in Him.

The birth of Jesus is absolutely essential to the message of salvation but the Cross of Christ is the place where history was changed forever.

God bless you this Christmas time...

AMEN