

Luke 2:10,11

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] Thank you.

We have been at this church since 1981, this building. So this year we're hoping that we'll redevelop. So maybe next year this place will be a building site.

Hopefully from then on, same time, same place, two years time. Let me thank the readers and musicians. It sounds terrific. I wonder how you would describe Christmas.

I wonder if I said you put Christmas into ten words, what would it be? How would you describe Christmas in ten words? Could you sum it up? There's a friend of mine who's a minister in a church in central London.

And they've been asking people who work in businesses and offices in the city, how they would sum up Christmas in under ten words. Let me give you some of them. There's one here, a one word answer, which is just the word expensive.

[1 : 19] There's another one, which is fun, friends, family, food, fruitcake, fairy lights and festivities. There's another one, the children seeing the joys on their faces.

Here's another, a more poignant one, memories. There's one that I won't read actually because the language is a little bit colourful. But it was to do with presents and booze, you can probably guess what it said.

But for a few moments, and before we sing our final carol, I want to take you back to the very first Christmas, where it all started. It's the message from the angels to the shepherds.

Nine words in the middle of Luke 2, which take us back right to the original meaning of Christmas. The original message to the shepherds, and so to us this evening.

Let me read you the whole sentence from chapter 2 and verses 10 and 11. The angels say, do not be afraid, for I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.

[2 : 27] Today in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you. He is Messiah. He is Lord. You might think that's much longer than nine words, isn't it? Let me give you the nine words.

Good news of great joy for all the people. Good news of great joy for all the people. We've got small children.

This Christmas is our daughter Phoebe's first Christmas. She's 11 months. And when you're 11 months, thankfully presents are not very important, are they? And you'll notice with very, very little children, they are as happy with the wrapping paper or the packaging as they are with the gifts.

So you spend ages selecting the Peppa Pig onesie, or the Thomas the Tank Engine toy. But actually when you give them to the little babies, what are they interested in?

They're not really interested in the gifts. What they care about is the bright, shiny wrapping paper. And wouldn't it be a tragedy if as adults or as young people we made the same mistake? That we missed the main gift of Christmas.

[3 : 34] For the sake of all the wrapping paper and all the trimmings and all the packaging that goes with it. So nine words that describe Christmas. Good news of great joy for all the people. It's five into three very easily.

The first thing is good news. It is good news. Now we are used to, aren't we, hearing an awful lot of bad news on our TV screen, on our internet pages. We are used to bad news.

In fact, the last couple of months have been probably more tragic than usual, haven't they? You think back to the bombs in Paris. You think of the war in Syria.

You think of the shootings in the US. Stabbings on the tube. And actually, I think that the shepherds in that passage in Luke 2 that was read to us weren't expecting good news either.

When these huge angels arrived in the sky. In fact, it says in the verse before, it says they were terrified when they saw them. But they are told, do not be afraid.

[4 : 36] I bring you good news. I don't know what you think of the message of Christianity. I don't know what kind of word association would come into your mind when I say the word Christianity.

But Christianity, at its core, is good news. It's not something to be afraid of. Wonderful good news tonight in a world of bad news.

Secondly, it's good news of great joy. And that same tone is carried on right the way through Luke 2. It's news of great joy.

It's something to celebrate. It's something, Christianity, which makes you sin. Why is it such good news of great joy? Well, the rest of the sentence tells you.

It is good news of great joy for all the people. Because today, in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you. The Messiah. The Lord.

[5 : 32] The royal town of David is Bethlehem. That's what it is. And this is a king who is born to be Messiah. He is the long-awaited king.

And we've read from Genesis, and from Isaiah, and from Micah. 500, 800 years. Even before that, they were looking for this rescuer. This saviour.

The people have been waiting for centuries. So he is no ordinary baby. And as I said earlier, we had a baby born. I mean, our family in January. There's been a couple of other babies born in the church.

And all babies bring joy, don't they? All babies bring joy. They bring sleepless nights. They bring nappies. They bring occasional trips to the hospital. But lots of joy.

But this is no ordinary baby. This is a king. This is the Messiah. But also, he is a saviour.

[6 : 29] Today, in the town of David, our verse says, A saviour has been born to you. I wonder what the words come to your mind when you think of saviour. When you think of rescuer.

When I think of rescue, I think of the AA. Or the RAC, isn't it? I'm not very good with mechanics. But I think to be an RAC man, or an AA man, it would be the coolest job, wouldn't it?

They ride around in these great kind of orange vans, or luminous motorbikes. They seem to have these great kind of outfits that they arrive in, which are slightly spacey.

It would be a wonderful job, wouldn't it? So let's just imagine. Let's imagine you're driving home for Christmas. It is freezing. Unlike this December. We'll throw in some snow as well, just for good measure.

But suddenly you have a problem with your car. You're driving in the fast lane, but you notice that you can't accelerate. So you move into the middle lane. You think, oh, it must be just the hill. But as you put your foot on the accelerator again, nothing happens.

[7 : 30] And suddenly you find yourself at 60 mile per hour, 50 mile per hour, 40 mile per hour, and you're in the slow lane. It's at 20 mile per hour with your kids in the back, shouting, are we there yet?

For the 15th time, when you realise there's something really wrong with the car. It's one of those Belgian lorries with huge great floodlights seemingly right on your tail.

And you feel like you're going backwards. People are flashing their lights at you because you're going so slow. And so you indicate with all your family there, and you pull over to the hard shoulder. You know what it's like when you're on the side of the motorway. You know you can't stay in the car. So you get the kids, wife, husband, or the boyfriend, or the girlfriend, out of the car. And it is chucking it down with snow.

It is windy. And you are there, perched on the embankment. It's absolutely freezing. You've run the RAC, but it feels like you've been there for four hours.

[8 : 30] Nobody is glad to be on the side of the motorway. And then suddenly, in the distance, you see them. The orange van with the flashing lights.

And they arrive, and he steps out, like this kind of a donet swearing, a leather onesie, and a shiny helmet. And he comes over, he fiddles with your car for a bit, and he fixes it.

He gives you even a cup of hot chocolate from his flask. He is a rescuer, isn't he? And you say, you've rescued me. You've saved Christmas. You can't beat the AA.

The AA is all about rescue. And that's what Christmas is all about. It's all about rescue. It's easy to miss the significance of Christmas, isn't it?

All the festivities, the fun, the friends, the fruitcake, the family, all the food. And it's easy to miss the big point of Christmas, that Jesus came to be a saviour.

[9 : 35] He came to be a saviour. Not from the hard shoulder, not from the embankment on the side of a motorway, but a saviour from sin. Who are sinners?

If you live where I live, you've got the people who fly tip. They're the sinners, isn't they? They're the really awful people that you can never catch. Fly tippers. Or you think, people who steal, I read this this week, in 2013, the Centre for Retail Research estimated that £978 million of business was lost to shoplifting and employee theft during the six weeks running up to Christmas.

It's astonishing, isn't it? £978 million. Lost the fever. But before I start pointing the finger at others, I notice that there are three fingers pointing back at me on there.

And I notice too, as I understand something of the Bible's message, that actually I am a thief as well. I've not stolen from M&S.; I don't fly tip, I promise. But actually, each one of us steals on a daily basis.

We steal God's place. God is the one who made this world. God is the one who made you. And God is the one who sits on the throne and we try to steal his place as if we should be in charge of our lives.

[11 : 01] As if we should run our life without any reference to him. So we ignore him. And the Bible calls that sin. Living as if we are in charge in a world that belongs to God.

But the wonderful good news of this message of the first Christmas is that there is another F. That it's not just festivity and family and food and fruitcake and fairy lights.

We'll all be enjoying all those things this Christmas. But it's possible for you to enjoy an even more wonderful F this season. It's the F, forgiveness.

Jesus is the Saviour and the King. And then the final thing in these words there is good news of great joy for all the people. The Saviour King has come for all kinds of people.

I think that's the point of the shepherds. You might not have asked that question. Why the shepherds? Why are they included in the story? Well when Princess Charlotte of Cambridge was born wasn't she?

[12 : 05] In May. When she was born in that hospital she was surrounded by the top surgeons of the country. on royalties. She was born in one of the best hospitals. And it was announced wasn't it on a framed piece of paper on a golden easel outside of Buckingham Palace.

When our little baby figure is born and seemingly when every other baby is born isn't it? We announce it don't we? By text. You get one of those texts. We're delighted to announce. We're overjoyed to tell you.

Or you get an email attached with loads of photos of a slightly bedraggled man holding a baby. When Princess Charlotte was born surrounded by top surgeons and royalty announced on a framed piece of paper on a golden easel.

But when Jesus Christ was born he was royalty. He was royalty. The royal family of God God's son was born in a cow shed.

Surrounded by animals. Yes wise men came from the east bringing gold and frankincense and myrrh. But the first people to know about the arrival of this baby were the shepherds. And I don't need to remind you the kind of people that shepherds work with.

[13 : 21] They worked with dumb smelly animals. Back then the shepherds were often the poorest of society. They were really on the margins. They were outcasts.

The angels could have announced couldn't they the birth of the child came to politicians to media outlets to famous celebrities. But they announced the good news of that first Christmas to shepherds with pretty anti-social working hours.

And some of you can relate to that. You say well actually I'm not a church goer. I don't do this religious stuff. But could this message of Christmas be for me?

I work in a hospital. I work in an office. I work in a school. I sell the big issue. These words tell us that it is good news of great joy for all people.

No one is too bad for Jesus. It's possible to be too good but no one is too bad. Good news of great joy for all the people. How do we respond?

[14 : 30] Let me give you three things really briefly as I finish. How do you respond? First of all stop. Stop. Maybe we shouldn't just launch into another Christmas on autopilot.

I know nothing about Star Wars. I've never been to see any of the films. I think I might have been to see one but I've forgotten it.

But I know nothing about it. I can't really tell the difference between Star Trek and Star Wars. It just has passed me by. I never had the models as children. And so this week has been this incredible bombardment from every angle of you must be into Star Wars.

What do I have to do if I want to get into it? I've got to stop. I've got to look who Darth Vader is and who Luke Skywalker is and CP30 or whoever these people are. Harrison Ford is in it I think. I need to stop and look and I need to go to the cinema and see it. And maybe with Christmas actually you need to stop and not just go through it on autopilot.

[15 : 29] Grab one of the books that will be there as you go out. Stop. And think about Jesus Christ because if he is who he says he is there's nothing more relevant for you.

Stop. Second thing is ask. Ask those questions. If you're a visitor tonight probably I've raised more questions to you than I've talked once tonight. The virgin birthed angels a speaking God who becomes one of us.

And it does raise lots of questions doesn't it? Maybe this seems like fairy stories to you. But actually the claim of the Bible is this is history. Verifiable history that you can build your life upon.

So why not go to the person who brought you or the person who gave you the flower and ask them those questions. Or a friend come back on a Sunday morning or an evening. Say to one of the people here let's go to the pub and talk about it.

Stop. Ask. And then lastly give. If you're a visitor to the church tonight you might be thinking well I knew we'd get to this. I knew we'd. Churches are always wanting your money aren't they?

[16 : 33] That's what they're after. Give. Let me explain what I mean by that. I don't want your money and neither does God. We're not taking a collection this evening.

The mince pies are free. In fact you can take loads of them all. And of course I'm saying give presents away. Be generous this Christmas. But the giving that the Bible demands of you is that you give yourself.

what God wants from you tonight is not that you suddenly change and become a better person. That you stop overeating at Christmas.

But what God wants from you is he wants you to give yourself. What the Bible asks of you is that you hand over control of your life to the Lord Jesus.

That you acknowledge that he is good news of great joy because he is saviour and Lord. He is boss. And actually it's a frightening thing to do isn't it?

[17 : 36] But Christmas demands that you give of yourself and come under his control and live with God in his rightful place.

Because God has so loved the world that he's given his one and only son. That whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Stop. Ask. Give. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Let's pray. Heavenly Father we thank you that the Bible teaches us a message of good news of great joy of a saviour who is born who is Lord of all. And I pray for each one of us wherever we are at in this journey whether we've never heard anything like this before whether we've heard it many times whether we are full of more questions than answers that your Holy Spirit would take these truths and apply them deeply in our lives and not let us go through another Christmas on autopilot for we pray this in Jesus name. Amen.