

# Carol Service Address

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[ 0 : 00 ] This is my 14th year of doing carol services. On average that's about 4 to 5 carol services per Christmas.

And there's always the question of what do you speak on at a Christmas carol service. What do you want from me? I could try and entertain you for 10 to 15 minutes. Maybe you've been in those carol services with jokes and poignant stories.

You couldn't go down the sentimental route, can you? Where the preacher talks about babies and talks about wonderful acts of service that's been done this year.

In 2016 we could talk about post-truth. It's the word of the year. The Oxford Dictionary's word of the year. Its definition is relating to circumstances or facts which are influential in shaping public opinion that appeal to emotion and personal belief.

Post-truth, that term has gone up in use by 2,000% in 2016 because of the EU referendum and the presidential election, according to the dictionary.

[ 1 : 10 ] And you might think, as we read the Christmas story and as we sang it, that's a great example of post-truth. But I would want to argue otherwise. And what I want to do in the few brief minutes that I have is to resurrect a great Christian truth.

I've never spoken on it in over 70 carol services in 14 years. I've never heard anyone speak about this great Christian truth in any carol service that I've been to.

And you might think that it's an old-fashioned truth and it's a relic. And you might even think it's laughable. But the great truth that I want to speak to you about this evening in these few minutes, which I think has a great deal of light to shine on your life and my life tonight, is the truth that Jesus Christ is going to return to this earth.

And I have one small phrase from the New Testament. Where Jesus Christ says, I will come again. I will come again. And it may surprise you that Jesus says that many, many times in the New Testament.

Now, so much is the need of this great truth that there are loads of Christians that have exaggerated it. The result is that people are put off, aren't they, by Christian oddballs.

[ 2 : 35 ] And by Christians who exaggerate this. And by controversy. You might remember, I don't know whether you're still there, there used to be a man with a megaphone at Oxford Circus that used to tell you, as you were going down onto the tube on the central line, that the world was going to end.

That it might end tomorrow. Sometimes you wish it did on the central line. But you know how it is, isn't it? When someone foolish Christian has tried to date the return of Jesus in glory.

The end of the world that you can date it. Someone might come up to you or you see the poster that Christ is going to come again tomorrow. Now you know and I know perfectly well that that is very unlikely indeed.

So you turn away from maybe your Christian friend by thinking, well he's as gullible as I thought all Christians were. And I have a surprise for you tonight.

If you are new tonight, and if you're new to the Bible, when you turn to the pages of the New Testament, and you ask Jesus about his return in glory, he knew very well that there would be people like that.

[ 3 : 41 ] He talks about them in Mark's Gospel chapter 13. And he says that people will come up to you and they'll say, here he is or here he comes. And he's coming again, maybe tomorrow.

And then Jesus says something very surprising. He says do not believe them. Do not believe them. Some people think that the Christian church is always telling us to believe things.

But the Christian church is actually here also to tell you not to believe certain things. It tells you not to believe that you can achieve paradise on this earth.

Not to believe the lie that you can create for yourself. The perfect family, the perfect world, the perfect Christmas. That can isolate you from pain.

And the Bible tells you not to believe people when they say Jesus will come tomorrow. And yet the Christian church is commissioned to say, particularly during Advent and during Christmas season, that as certainly as Jesus came, in humility and generosity and meekness and helplessness as a baby, so that same Jesus will return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

[ 5 : 10 ] He has come. You read about it. You sang about it this evening. He left heaven. He was born of the Virgin Mary.

He came to earth. He lived the life of God on earth. He performed miracles that backed up his claim. He was crucified, died and was buried.

You can read about it. We've got gospels at the back. Eyewitness accounts of the life and death of the Lord Jesus. We'd love you to take one away and read it. He came. He came.

He came. But the Bible tells us very clearly, he is coming again. And I think that saves us from despair.

We look out, don't we, at limitless space and wonder what on earth is going to happen. That we don't have to despair over the situation of our world.

[ 6 : 14 ] You read the horrific reports of Aleppo this week. It's been horrific, hasn't it? And where will it end, we ask? Well, if we believe that Jesus Christ will return, we do believe that he has got his hand on the tiller.

That he is in control. That he saves us. It saves us. The truth that he's coming again, saves us from despair. But it also saves you from despising Jesus Christ.

Because if he is really going to return on the last day, it means a great deal. That he will have the last word.

It means that no one can compare to him. It's amazing the amount of intelligent people you meet today who say, I do believe in God, or in a God.

At least I think I do. But Jesus can't be the only way. Look at all the other religions of the world. But if Jesus Christ is going to return, it means that he is the only Lord.

[ 7 : 25 ] Everyone else may have something to say. Something to give us. Something to commend in their teaching to us. But Jesus is going to come as judge. What a dreadful thing it will be.

If when we meet him face to face on that day. And his name has been on our lips only in blasphemy. What a dreadful thing.

As he faces us on that last day. And we've never paid any attention to him while we have the opportunity. If he's going to come, it means he is the Lord.

And it means that you and I are going to have to give an account of the way we've used the world. And used our own lives.

Now I just want to ask and answer the question before I sit down this evening. How does Jesus Christ prepare us for that great day which is beyond my imagination and yours when he will return?

[ 8 : 34 ] And I think the Lord Jesus prepares us for his coming by coming to you today. Jesus, you see, if you look carefully at the New Testament, not only says, I have come and I will come again at the last day but he keeps saying in the Gospels and the Apostles say in their epistles he will come here and now.

Let me try and explain to you what I mean. In John's Gospel written by the Apostle John Jesus explains to his disciples that one day he will come again to take them to the place where he's prepared for them.

And he then says to them the Holy Spirit is going to come in the meantime and take my place with you. And when he comes John 14 verse 18 I will come to you.

So he prepared them for that great day what the Christian church calls that Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to the church and entered into the hearts of the believers.

And when the Holy Spirit entered into the hearts of believers lo and behold they suddenly found that they knew Jesus Christ again. No longer did they have to depend on him being with them in a certain place and at a certain time in a certain space.

[ 10 : 04 ] He was with them wherever they went by his Holy Spirit. He's come again. And that great joy has been with the Christian church ever since.

The gift of the Holy Spirit in your heart wherever you are. You cannot have anything more practical than that. I spoke to someone this week after another carol service and we got talking and I said to them do you believe in Jesus Christ?

The man said he's such a wonderful example but it's just not practical. He had to go back to his office. But I was dying to speak to him about the gift of the Holy Spirit of God come down to earth by his Spirit into our lives to enable us by his power to follow Jesus.

There's a verse which is very precious for many of us who are Christians and I want to leave you with this this evening. It's in the last book of the Bible where Jesus is writing to the church of his own day.

And it's fascinating Jesus has got some pretty rude things to say to the church of his day and I'm sure he has got some pretty straight things to say to us as the church in our day. And at the end of the letter there's a strange twist to it.

[ 11 : 30 ] He finishes his letter by saying this and I want you to listen very carefully. He says look, behold I stand at the door and I knock.

What's that? The Lord Jesus Christ outside the doors of the church unable to get in. And I'm afraid that's very much like the church in our country and the west.

Behold I stand at the door and knock. And if any man if any woman if any boy if any girl hear my voice and open the door I will come.

There's our phrase I will come to him and I will eat with him. Do you see Jesus Christ says to the church of his own day I'm outside but if there's anyone there who will open the door of their hearts I will come.

I will come here and now. You tonight have not got to wait until tomorrow. You've not got to wait until ten years. You've not got to wait until your older children.

[ 12 : 40 ] You've not got to wait for that final day when all the accounts will be settled up on that day of reckoning. I will come to you today Jesus says. I know that for some of you this is the only opportunity I shall ever have to speak to you.

But I want to commend Jesus Christ as someone who is able to come into your life today and change it. Transform it.

For me it was in 1993 I was 17 years old on a camp in North Wales. And so Christ opened the door of my heart and I'm thankful that he did. I didn't make much progress for many years but he did come into my heart and love.

And I have met so many people ever since who've taken that great step. And they've responded to Christ's promise that he will come. And I have never met anyone who's asked Christ to come into their lives and then gone on to serve him and obey him who has regretted that step.

It is the greatest step that you can ever take. I want you to read with me the third verse of our little town of Bethlehem. I don't know whether you can just flip back and just look at this verse with me.

[ 14 : 01 ] I'm not going to ask you to read it out loud. It's okay. But the third verse of our little town of Bethlehem as you change it. Preaches my sermon far better than I ever can. It says this.

Can you see it? How silently how silently the wondrous gift is given. So God imparts to human hearts the blessing of his heaven.

No ear may hear his coming but in this world of sin where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in.

Yes to be Lord as you leave this evening as you walk out of those doors behind you. Why not say Lord Jesus Christ you've never been in my Christmas or in my life really.

Come into my heart today. Pick up a gospel. Read an eyewitness account of the Lord Jesus Christ and be convinced by the evidence.

[ 15 : 13 ] Speak to a friend. Grab me. Let's meet up and talk about it. Jesus Christ because the Lord Jesus Christ has come in history and he will come in the future.

But wonderfully he can come to you today. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Let's pray.