

Carol Service: GLORY

You have sat, stood and sung well during our readings and carols. I ask you to be patient for a short while longer as I want to share some thoughts about Christmas. To so many people Christmas is about getting, giving, buying, spending, eating and drinking. We may say “*Christmas has become too commercialised.*” This picture I came across takes a swipe at the commercial side of Christmas!

That 1st Christmas we’ve read the angels declared “*Glory to God in the highest.*” (Luke 2:14) We read the angels gave glory to God in heaven. The word “glory” is a strange word and we use it in different ways - some even singing it about their favourite team. My dictionary gives a range of meanings “*renown, honourable fame, adoring praise, resplendent majesty*”. This angelic choir sung this about God because of the birth of baby Jesus; He should have this adoring praise, resplendent majesty, this renown and honourable fame.

The angels giving glory to God is in stark contrast to the advertisers, to many people’s emphasis and idea of Christmas. The angels praise is an emphasis rooted in the real events that occurred that 1st Christmas and it points us to what Christmas is really about - *Glory to God*. I want to use the letters of the word GLORY for my headings to help us to see various things as to what Christmas should be and really is:

God Centred.

Christmas is to the glory of God. Some of our Christmas carols draw our attention to this note of worship, of glory to God, of adoring Jesus, Christ the Lord and sound a note of

praise. The Bible narrative centres not on the people as such, but on what God was doing and achieving in and through them. Even the angels who appeared to the shepherds do not draw attention to themselves, but turn all the attention on God and what He was doing.

It is so easy for us all to be caught up in and with all the Christmas rush and bustle and we fail to be God centred even at Christmas. We take no time to think about these events that have altered history and affect our lives even some 2000 years later. We need to be God centred in our lives this Christmas and praise and thank God for the Lord Jesus. We see Christmas is also:

Love Motivated.

If we are God centred, we will surely want to ask the question “*Why did God send His Son into the world in this way?*” The answer is given in John 3:16. There was no reason in us as to why God should be moved to send His Son into this world. In the light of His glory we realise He did it because He wanted us to know His love and forgiveness.

This is incredible because all of us have done, said and thought things that are wrong, we are not right with God, for He is pure and holy, but God sent His Son to be the Saviour - to save, to rescue us from the guilt and punishment of those wrong things. God didn't have to do such, but He did it motivated by His love. Have we seen and recognised anything of this amazing love? This means that Christmas is really:

Out of This World.

We celebrate Christmas, but the origin is really out of this world - from God to mankind; “*peace on earth*” - sent from God in heaven. Christmas is not an invention of the advertisers, the marketing people, not even the Victorians or Charles Dickens – all of whom who did so much to shape our current Christmas traditions, but it really is out of this world.

There is so much about the Christmas story that is not natural, it is supernatural, it is Divine and of God. To start with we are introduced to angels here, there and everywhere as they go to Zachariah announcing John the Baptist’s birth, then the angel Gabriel appears to Mary, then an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph while he was considering breaking off his engagement to Mary when he finds out she is pregnant and he knows it’s not his baby; then as an angel appeared to the shepherds, followed by a great company of angels. Such things are not everyday events!

There is the supernatural, Divine conception of the Lord Jesus. This is something amazing. In the case of Jesus, it **wasn’t** a normal birth. Matthew twice records that the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Does that seem far-fetched to you? It’s not just far-fetched—it’s absurd, it’s impossible - humanly speaking. That is the point. This was God intervening in a unique way. It was a miracle.

Then there is the star guiding the wise men from the East and stopping over the very house with the child was. Also, the birth of the Lord Jesus was a fulfilment of prophecies in minute detail going back hundreds, even thousands of years. All the events at and surrounding the 1st Christmas were out

this world, supernatural, or more correctly Divine, so out of this world.

We can be too familiar with or even sentimentalise the account of Christmas and we fail to be awed by the wonder of its Divine origins. Maybe this Christmas we can take time out to think on these things and realise it is:

Revolutionary.

Many people view Christianity as doing good, doing our best, going to church from time to time to be ok with God. Most world religions place the emphasis on doing certain things to get to Paradise. Yet the Christmas story, part of the Bible's message, is revolutionary, for it tells us that God has done all that is needed for us to be right with Him, to be rescued from our wrong, our sin, He has designed, made and provided this way to Him and therefore to heaven. Religion tells us to do things to get to heaven; the gospel of Jesus says that it's all done and we are to receive it as a gift.

Is not by us doing our bit, earning our merit points, but we are to accept as ours what God has given and provided us in the Lord Jesus, His indescribable gift. God sent His Son into the world to be the Saviour, but He is only the Saviour of those who trust Him and believe in Him. Not just a head acceptance, but a heart acceptance and trust e.g. Blondin and the wheelbarrow.

The Christmas story is revolutionary in that it says we can't do anything to help ourselves get right with God, but we need to trust the Saviour born there in Bethlehem, provided by God

and announced by those angels to the shepherds. If, when this Saviour is our Saviour, then Christmas is a:

Year Long Joy and Wonder.

Some people can't wait to get their Christmas decorations up, the shops have Christmas trees in them from what seems to be about Easter time! People like the Christmas feeling of joy, wonder and try to make it last for as long as possible. Yet Jesus, the baby born that 1st Christmas, is not just for Christmas, but for life. When we trust Him as our own Saviour it means we will always be aware of the joy and wonder of Christmas, also of Easter, because His love and care will be known all year long too. This would include the ups and downs, the good times and the sad times. That is something of what is meant in the Carol "O Little town of Bethlehem" when it says "*O come to us, **abide** with us, Our Lord Immanuel*" for we have the Christ of Christmas being with, staying with and abiding with us all year long, indeed all throughout our lives.

I pray this Christmas would be really blessed and happy for us all, our families and as we all go into a New Year we would know many blessings, but especially we would all go into the future having the Saviour Jesus as our own Saviour and knowing God's love, help, joy and wonder in all we do and go through.