

Watchnight Service

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[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 2, which is to be found at page 1027 in the Church Bible in front of you. The Gospel of Luke chapter 2.

Luke tells of the birth of Jesus. In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

[1 : 0 9] She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, Don't be afraid.

I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you.

He is the Messiah, the Lord. And this will be a sign to you. You'll find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel.

And when the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that's happened, which the Lord has told us about.

[2 : 3 1] And so they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. And when they'd seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.

And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Thanks be to God. Great. And it'll be a great encouragement to me if you could keep your Bibles open there on that passage.

And we'll just take a couple of moments just to think about it. And let me pray for us as we start. So Father, we pray that you'd speak to us on this Christmas Eve as we look forward and remember the coming of the Lord Jesus and think to his return.

[3 : 41] Amen. Well, it struck me there that Luke's gospel is really the newsy gospel. I wonder if you noticed that. It's filled with facts and figures, isn't it? So there are all those historical details at the start of it.

And I wonder how you feel about news. My guess is that for a lot of us, news dominates our day. It's the first thing we look to in the morning, the last thing that we consider it day at night before we go to sleep, even if it's only our news feed on Facebook or Twitter or something like that.

We are in love with the news. We can't get enough of it. And 2019 has really been the year where news has hit cult status.

I wonder if you've noticed what the most popular podcast in the UK was voted on by podcast listeners this year. Well, it was a news political podcast, Brexitcast.

Maybe some of you guys have heard of it. And they even made a TV show off the back of it. And all the presenters became minor celebrities. And as we look beyond Christmas to the next year, to 2020, let me ask you, what is the news that we are going to need to hear in 2020 if that year is going to be better than the year behind?

[5 : 08] What is the news that we are going to put our hopes and fears in? Well, for Luke's, the newsy gospel, we see news at the center of this passage.

And we are really going to concentrate on two verses in this passage, verses 10 and 11 there. And we are going to look at three announcements or news broadcasts that the angels make to the shepherds in this passage.

And the first one is in verse 10 there where we read, the angel said to him, do not be afraid. And the angel announces, don't be afraid.

And my guess is if you were a shepherd on a hill 2,000 years ago and an angel appeared out of nowhere on that hill, you would have been very afraid.

But it's not just them then who were afraid. It's perhaps us here tonight, now, who are afraid. You see, 2019 has also been the year of very scary news.

[6 : 18] We look back and we remember the Sri Lankan bombings and Easter where 200 people died. And then we remember the terrorist attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand, where 50 died.

And then we think of London Bridge only a couple of weeks ago. Then we think of the natural disasters that we've seen in this year. We think of all the floods in Yorkshire recently, the ongoing fires in Australia, the volcano in New Zealand.

There's lots to be afraid of. And then I wonder how you've come here tonight. You might have some issues on your mind that are fearful. Things in your life where you're wondering if there's any hope for next year, for 2020.

Any hope for job. Any hope for marriage. Any hope to get out of the mess that we might have got ourselves into. Will there be any hope then?

And so we might receive the announcement that the angel makes. We might hear what it says. Don't be afraid. And wonder, can this be true?

[7 : 27] The reason that the angel tells the shepherds this is because of the news that the angel brings. And that's our second point there. The angel announces good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

And just look down there at verse 10. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. I wonder if you maybe rank news in your mind.

So obviously right at the bottom we've got the rubbish news. We're not going to talk about that. No one wants to hear bad news on Christmas Eve. But then maybe you've got okay news. And that's news that you kind of know is important.

Maybe it's the metro news on the underground. You read the broadsheets. It's on the front news page. It's got to be important. I don't know why. It doesn't really affect me. I don't understand how it affects me.

And then maybe you've got the better news. And that's the news that's going to make you feel a bit better. It might not be as important or big, but it's the news that's going to make you feel happy. And that's maybe like who won Strictly.

[8 : 33] Strictly Come Dancing. That's good news. Your football team won. That's better news. That makes me feel happy. Finding out what the Christmas number one is. That's good news.

That's going to make me feel just a little bit happier. It's a bit relevant. Finding my train running on time. That's better news. But the news that the angel brings here, I wonder if you notice what kind of news it is.

It's good news that will cause great joy for all the people. It's the best news ever. It's like having all your Christmases rolled into one.

And then just notice the nature of the news. It's good news. And it's good in every sense of the word. So maybe you're here tonight, and you're someone here who's concerned about the environment.

Well, this is news about how creation's going to be restored better to what it was. Maybe you're a person here who's tonight who's concerned about rights and dignity.

[9 : 35] Well, this is news about how people are going to be made more human than they ever were before. How they're going to be given their full dignity, and there'll be complete equality between all people.

No winners, no losers. And then notice that this is news that causes an emotional response. What does the angel say? This is news that will cause great joy.

This is news that will make you very happy. A deep happiness that will stay. Kind of like the happiness that you might have had, if you can think back to when you were a child, and you opened that very first Christmas present.

And then notice whom this news is for. It's for all people. It's free for everyone to receive. All are welcome.

But notice what kind of news the angel brings here. It's not political news. It's not news of progress. It's not technology. It's not a new wisdom or new way of thinking.

[10 : 43] But it is news of a Christmas baby. Just look at verse 11 there. Has been born to you a baby.

Well, I don't want to play down how awesome it is when babies are born. I'm a bachelor, so babies are babies to me.

I don't really get them vaguely. I know it's quite important. Michael, where's Michael, had a Christmas baby, the very first Christmas baby born in Glasgow last year.

And he knew what a fantastic time that was this time last year, maybe a little later. But babies being born does happen fairly often, doesn't it?

So then how can this news be the best news ever? Why is this baby so special? The first thing that we notice here that gives us a clue as to why this baby is so special is where it is born.

[11 : 44] And I wonder if you notice verse 11 there. Today in the town of David. So it's not born in Gartnavel Hospital, but it's born in King David's town, the town where David, great King David, came from, the place where God promised he would send a king who would reign forever.

And then notice the baby's job title. Maybe you're someone here tonight who has children, and you're wondering what kind of job they'd do when they grow up, if they ever do grow up.

Will they be a plumber? Will they be a doctor? Will they be an engineer? Will they be a builder? Will they be a self-help guru? Well, what's the job title that this baby has in this passage?

Look down at verse 11. A savior. And then we read not just any savior, but verse 11. He is the Messiah.

Messiah there is really a Hebrew word. It's a Bible, a fancy word in the Bible that means God's promised once for all savior. And that's our third point that we notice in this passage.

[12 : 56] The angel announces the Messiah, God's forever savior. Now, you might be sitting here tonight saying, James, be real.

I don't need a savior. And if that is you, then perhaps you're not alone. Many of us here today, or in Glasgow and in Britain, think like that.

So I wonder if you noticed one of the big headlines at Christmas this year has been how a teacher in England has tried to change some of the words in Away in the Manger. You know Away in the Manger, popular carol, how it goes.

It's the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay. But they wanted to change the words to the little baby Jesus asleep on the hay.

And what's the issue there? What is the teacher objecting? They're saying they don't need a savior, someone to whom they owe something to, that they should call them Lord.

[13 : 53] They don't need a savior is what they're saying. But then why do we need a savior? Why is it so important that we do have a savior?

Well, recently I've been watching a sci-fi drama. I don't know if any of you watch sci-fi dramas. It's called The Expanse. And I'll give you the premise of the program. It's basically how in the distant future, humans have colonized the entire solar system.

And what happens is an alien civilization comes in. And it's a civilization that is vastly, vastly, vastly superior than our civilization, than human civilization.

And people don't understand it. And they try to use it for their own benefit. And they try to live as if they can just ignore the civilization.

And so time and again, they find themselves having to be rescued by the hero of the show, a chap called Captain Holden, who seems to have a direct line to the aliens.

[14 : 59] And sometimes he needs to save them because, well, it's just bad people doing bad things who are trying to use the aliens for their own profit. And the aliens get upset about that and want to destroy and annihilate everything.

But then other times, it's simply because people want to ignore the aliens and they want to live their own way and carry on as if they're in charge and not the aliens.

And in both instances, Holden has to save the people. And in both instances, people in this program, they think they're in charge as they act against these aliens.

And they don't realize the full extent of the danger that they're in. And so time and again, in this program, every episode basically, they need a savior.

In the same way, when it comes to God, we approach God thinking that we're in charge. And we reject God's good laws that he's given us how we should live.

[16 : 08] And we've ruined his creation. We have said no to having a relationship with him. And instead, we choose to live lives our own way outside of God.

And when we do that, that's the Bible's word for sin. For every time, we know the good that we should do in a situation, no matter how small it is, and don't do it, that's called sin.

The issue there is not the thing that we do, but it's what it says about what we think about God, that we can ignore doing the good things that he says we should do.

So, you might be able to tell from my accent I'm not British. I wasn't born in Whiteinch. I don't grow up in Postle Park. Not from Glasgow.

South African, originally. And our president in South Africa is a chap called Jacob Zuma. And they wanted to impeach him. There's a lot of impeaching going on at the moment. And when they're reading up the charges to him in the South African parliament, they'd read embezzlement, you've taken money, you've given your friends jobs, his reaction almost sparked outrage in this parliament.

[17 : 27] A tiny reaction. What he did was he simply rolled his eyes. He was as if he was saying, you don't matter.

I'm in charge. I'm going to do what I like. Whatever. In common youth talk these days. And when we do the good, when we fail to do the good, that we know that we should be doing, that when we try to ignore God in our lives, it's as if we're rolling our eyes towards God.

And that places us in a very dangerous situation. And therefore, we need a savior to save us in spite of ourselves.

and we should be very afraid. But what does the angel announce? What is the great and glorious news of Christmas that we celebrate and remember at this time of year?

The angels announce that we don't need to be afraid. The angel has brought good news that will cause great joy for all people that a baby has been born whom God has sent to save his people in spite of himself.

[18 : 45] And so Jesus, God sent Jesus into the world. And we remember how Jesus died in the cross in our place. He lived the life that we couldn't live and died the death that we couldn't die to bring us to God.

And we'll think more about that in Easter and in the new year coming. But then how should we respond to this great news? How will you respond to this great news?

Well, one way might be to come to one of the guest services in January. You might have had a flyer on your chair there. We've got guest services 12th of January, a fresh start.

And that's a great time to come to hear more about the Christian faith. Or you might like to come to one of those courses, Christian Explored course running from the 12th of January for six weeks. And that's a great way to find out more about this new, exciting news.

And in a moment we're going to sing one of those favorite carols, the first Noel. And after that we'll be celebrating the Lord's Supper together.

[19 : 56] And another way that we might respond might be to take the Lord's Supper trusting in Jesus as your Savior and as your Lord for the very first time.

In either of those cases please do come chat to me afterwards. I'd love to hear more from you. But let me close for us in a prayer and then Michael will come up and lead us in the first Noel.

So Father, we thank you for this good news of Christmas. We pray that we take it to heart that we trust in Jesus more and more. In Jesus' name, Amen.