

Carol Service Part 3

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[0 : 00] Choir are available at a fee to come and sing at weddings, probably better at funerals, christenings and other celebrations like that.

And if you want a song writing for a special occasion, Colin's your man because he wrote that song for us. So well done, Colin. That's lovely. Thank you. So we're getting to the heart of Christmas and we're going to think about what sort of things we get up to at Christmas because almost every year we do very similar things and get up to the same sort of things.

So what happens at Christmas? What are things to be able to do? Well, one of the things that we often do, many of us at Christmas, is we go visiting. We go visiting or people come visit us. The relatives come and visit us.

We've all got relatives like that, haven't we? There are always some in every family. Whether we want them to visit us or not is a different matter, but they still come and visit us every year.

And not just our immediate family, perhaps uncles, aunties, even the dreaded in-laws may come and visit us as well. But also, we go visiting. We go visiting with our cars laden with gifts and presents and food and all sorts of things like that.

[1 : 37] And some of the people we go to visit, we actually like. And some of the people we go to visit, there's a reason we only visit them once a year. Because, well, yes, they're just interesting people.

So visiting, that's an important part of Christmas. And we're thinking about, of course, about the birth of Jesus Christ. Who came visiting us at Christmas?

Well, the first part of that verse, remember we saw that Bible verse, which is the heart of Christmas. It says, Christ Jesus came into the world. Christ Jesus came into the world.

If he came into the world, it means that before that time, he wasn't in the world. He was outside of the world. Which leads us to the conclusion, which we find elsewhere as well, that this person who was born in the stable in Bethlehem was indeed God's son.

He was someone who had existed, who had lived before his birth, unlike us. He was the one who was God from the beginning. But he was born into this world.

[2 : 47] He became a human being. He became a person in every way like us, except for one thing. And we'll come to that one thing a bit later on.

So Christmas is about God visiting us. God bringing us a gift. God living with us. One of the readings that we had, which spoke about a promise that God had given hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, which foretold that a virgin would be with child, and that he would be called Emmanuel, which means God with us.

People throughout the generations, and even today, ask the question, or pose the question, are we alone in the universe? And the truth is, no, we're not alone in the universe, because God is real.

God is with us in the universe. Perhaps you've got relatives that you've never met. Perhaps you've got relatives your parents talk about, or grandparents talk about, so-and-so, Auntie Gertrude, who went to live in Australia.

And you've never met them, but you hear stories about them. And you may wonder, well, do they really exist? Do they really exist? Are they really there? Perhaps they may send you a Christmas card once a year, signed Auntie Gertrude.

[4 : 13] Well, that, of course, could be a forgery. It could be somebody else. Perhaps you've even seen a photograph of them. But who's to say that's Auntie Gertrude? It may have been anybody, for all you know. The only way you can be certain that that person really exists, and isn't just a figment of the imagination of your family or friends, is, of course, if they were to come and visit you.

If they were to come to you and knock on your door and say hello and introduce themselves and say, here I am. I'm your Auntie Gertrude from Australia. And so that we might know that God is real. Yes, God has written to us the Bible. God has, in one sense, shown us what he's like by the world in which we live, which shows his creative design.

But the only way we can truly know that God is real is that he visits us, and that's exactly what he did at Christmas. This child who is born in the stable, this one who grew into the man who spoke and taught and performed miracles and was murdered upon the cross, was someone who again and again declared himself to be the Son of God, and by the things that he did, proved himself to be the Son of God.

If we want evidence that God is real, it's there at Christmas. That God has come to us. And of course, one of the greatest evidences that this person was no ordinary person, no ordinary man, was that not only did he die, as we must all die, but he rose again from the grave.

[5 : 43] And over the course of 40 days, was seen by hundreds and hundreds of people. Yes, Christmas is about visiting.

God visiting us. What else do we do at Christmas then? What else happens at Christmas time? Well, of course, one of the things that we do is, of course, we all go spending money, don't we? That's inevitable at Christmas. And what do we spend our money on? Well, we spend, of course, on food and drink. We go down to the supermarket or wherever it may be, and we buy more food than we can possibly eat.

We eat more food than we can possibly stomach, and then we throw away a great deal of food which is uneaten. So we buy, drink, food, eat, drink to excess.

We spend money on these things. But of course, we also spend money on presents as well. We like to buy gifts for one another, and we like others to buy us gifts. We hope that by buying somebody a gift, that will encourage them to buy us one.

[6 : 50] That works with Christmas cards, doesn't it? You never send everybody a Christmas card that you should do, but then you get one from somebody you know who you didn't send one to. You think, oh, I better write one and send one off.

Presents can be a bit like that as well. We have to give them. And of course, some of those gifts that we buy, very expensive, hundreds, maybe even pounds, even more than that. Again, unfortunately, the truth is that most of the presents that are bought are either forgotten about after a day or two, or they break, or of course, they just leave them unused because we really didn't want them in the first place.

So we spend money, lots and lots of money, on things that ultimately don't last. But what about Jesus Christ? If he came to visit us, did he bring a gift?

Did he come to spend? What did he come to spend? Ultimately, we know that Jesus Christ had nothing. He was the son of a carpenter.

He was born in a stable, didn't even have a room. So what could he spend? Well, the truth is that he spent himself. He came to give himself.

[8 : 04] We know that God came into the world, but the gift that he brought and the gift that he spent was himself. Remember that saying? It says, Christ Jesus came into the world.

We've seen that already. To save sinners. To save sinners. I said just a bit earlier on that there's one thing about Jesus that is different from us.

We know that Jesus got hungry. We know he got thirsty. We know that he cried. We know that he laughed. We know that in every way he experienced the things that we experience. Sorrows, griefs, loss, bereavement, etc.

But there's one thing that Jesus did not experience and was not a part of him, but is part of us. Every single one of us. And that's that taboo word that nobody uses anymore, sin.

It's old fashioned. But really there's no word to replace it because ultimately it's the only word that really expresses the problem with us and the problem with our world is sin.

[9 : 04] It makes us get into trouble. It makes us get things wrong. It's a fault in our genes, in our DNA that causes us to be selfish or greedy or cruel or proud or gossiping or just plain nasty.

And it harms our relationships with one another. The things that we see happening around the world are down to ultimately sin in the heart of men and women.

But it especially has damaged our relationship with God, the God who made us that we might know him. And for that reason Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

To sort out the problem of sin. To repair the relationship that God wants us to have with him. You see, God deserves our love.

God deserves our trust. God deserves our obedience to his perfect and good laws. But instead all we've done is take from him, not give back to him.

[10:09] We've robbed God of what is rightfully his. By living for ourselves. Serving ourselves. Pleasing ourselves. And ultimately we have now placed ourselves in massive debt to God.

A debt that we can never ever pay back. Not by any amount of giving of our money. Or any amount of good deeds we might do. That huge debt that we owe God.

Because of what he's given and we've taken and not returned. Has placed us in a place where we've made God our enemy. And instead of being those who enjoy his love and friendship.

We are those who now are under his judgment. Those who have been separated from him. And are awaiting a punishment that we deserve. But this verse says Christ Jesus came into the world.

He was born in Bethlehem. Born as a baby. To save sinners. To rescue us from the debt that we've accumulated against God. To get us out of the red and into the black.

[11:10] And to do that he spent his own life. To purchase our forgiveness. To pay off our debts. To make us right with God. That's why there's a picture of the cross there.

Because the goal and the purpose of Jesus' life. Was not simply to come into the world and say. Look God is real. Here I am. But to do something more than that.

At the cross he paid your debt and mine. He purchased our freedom from sin. And from its penalty. With his own life. Dying the death that we deserve.

This is the very heart of God's love. In giving Jesus Christ. That he might make us to be forgiven people. So there's one more thing.

Jesus spent himself. Just as we spend. On frivolous things. He spent his life on something. Which he counted to be the most precious thing of all.

[12:10] You and me. But there's one more thing that happens at Christmas. Isn't there? One more thing that we do. We're giving. We like giving at Christmas.

And there's something we look forward to. Isn't there? At Christmas morning. Is receiving and giving gifts. And to be honest. Isn't it? We enjoy receiving them. But there's a lot of joy to be had in giving gifts.

In seeing people's faces. Especially of course when we give them something with a surprise. We all like a surprise. Yes we all like things that we want. But ultimately we like a surprise.

But of course we've got to practice having that face. When of course we get the usual. The pair of socks. Or the Christmas jumper that's been knitted for us. By that Anne Gertrude in Australia.

That's probably one of the things. The reasons we don't see it very often. But. We give gifts to one another. Christmas is about giving. It's very important.

[13:09] And so again we come finally. What gift does Jesus give? If he came into the world. And he spent himself. He spent himself. The most precious possession that God had.

Was himself. And he gave. And spent himself on the cross to die for us. What has he actually purchased for us? What's the gift. That comes through his death. And through his life. Through that birth at Christmas.

Well it is that. It's life. Life is more than the things that we have. Isn't it? Life is more than the things that we eat. Or the things that we drink at Christmas.

It's more than the clothes that we wear. It's more than the things that we do. We can own the whole world. We can have untold riches. We can have untold possessions.

And yet not have the life that Jesus Christ came to purchase for us. And the life that he came to give. That's eternal life.

[14:06] It's life in all its fullness. It's life that's not ending when we die. It's life that can be enjoyed as much by the homeless person as by the rich. As much by the hungry person as the fat.

Jesus died and rose again. To give us life that is unending. That was always the plan. That was always the reason for his visit.

That was always the reason for his coming. And that's why he's alive now. To give that to us. Give us a life free from guilt. From the past that hangs over us.

From the skeletons in our cupboards. From the sin that controls us and spoils life and our relationships. He came to give us life to enjoy God's love.

And his friendship. A life that really is out of this world. And that last part of the verse that we've been looking at. Tells us how that can be ours.

[15:05] Remember that trustworthy saying. It's absolutely true. Christ Jesus came into the world. We know that's true. Whether we believe in the Bible or not. We know it's true. Because historians tell us it's true.

A person called Jesus Christ genuinely lived. And walked amongst the people of Israel. In the first century AD. We know that he died upon a cross.

That's true. We know that he suffered at the hands of the Roman soldiers. When they crucified him. That's true. And we know that he rose again from the dead. Because hundreds of people saw him. And were eyewitnesses of that fact. The last part of this verse explains. How this life that Jesus purchased for us. And gives freely to us.

Can be ours. It's a strange phrase isn't it? Of whom I am the worst. The person who wrote this. Was a man called Paul.

[16:00] His original name was Saul. And he was a very very zealous man. A man who was filled with hate. Hate for anybody who didn't agree with him.

He used to arrest people. Just simply because they put their trust in Jesus. He used to even get those people. Not only put in prison. But if he could. He got them executed as well. But then something happened to him.

You see he thought that by doing the things he was doing. He was doing good. He thought he was pleasing God. He thought that he was living a right life. In his own eyes. But one day he realized that he was not right with God.

He realized that he was a sinner. And that he needed forgiveness. Now hopefully none of us have gone around killing people. Or executing people. We may not have done those things.

So we may think that we're okay. We're pretty nice people. Good people. But as we've seen at the very beginning. All of us are infected with sin. All of us can hold our hands up and say.

[17:01] I am selfish. I have been greedy. I have been proud. I have not given to God. The love and obedience that he deserves. And everything we've done in our lives. We've tried to be guided by our own self.

Understanding of what's right and wrong. But even then we've got it wrong. Even when we try to do what is right. We still get it wrong. We still make mistakes. We've all sinned.

And it's only when we recognize that. As Paul did. Only when we see ourselves as sinners. That we see that we need forgiveness. You see within us.

There's those natural desires. Aren't there. If I can put it that way. If we eat when we feel hungry.

We drink when we feel thirsty. Well the only time that we're really going to feel.

That sense of needing forgiveness. Is when we feel guilty. When we know and see and recognize.

Our great need for that. And it's only then that we ask Jesus. To save us.

[18:00] Jesus Christ came into the world. To save sinners. Of whom I'm the worst. When we have that sense of feeling bad about ourselves. When we realize what we're really like. When we look in the mirror. And see into our own hearts.

The things that are there. That are unpleasant. It's only then that we will say. Jesus I need you to save me. I'm so grateful that you came. Into the world for me. Such is your love.

I wonder if you've ever thought of yourself in that way. Ever thought of yourself as someone who sinned against God. It's only then that you can enjoy the forgiveness he brings.

It's only if you've ever felt cut off from God. That you'll ever want to be his friend and write with him. It's only when you miss out in life.

And you realize that actually all the things you have. Just don't satisfy and make sense. That then you will look to the one who does make sense of life. And who has made sense of life.

[18:58] For millions and millions of people. Every year. That's the truth about Christmas. God loves you. God has come into this world for you.

And God has given himself for you. To save you from that sin. Which spoils, corrupts and destroys. And the only way that you and I can have a Merry Christmas.

Is when we come to Jesus. Who came to us. To save us. And forgive us. Our desire and longing this Christmas.

Mine is that you should know this Lord Jesus. That you should know his forgiveness. And know the life he brings. But it takes action on our part. It takes action in recognizing who we are.

And coming to him. Not coming to church firstly. But coming to him. And saying Lord Jesus please save me. Please come into my life. Please rescue me.

[19 : 58] And give me that life everlasting. Which you purchased for me. That wonderful gift. That's the gift that Christ has at Christmas. What are we going to do?

Leave it there? Or are we going to unwrap it and enjoy it? I would love to encourage you. If you've got questions about Christianity. If you're interested in finding out more about this Jesus.

Come and speak to me. Or somebody else who's brought you to church this evening. Come along when you can on a Sunday. You'll always be welcome. We're not particularly strange. Some of us. Most of us are fairly normal. But we would love to point you to Jesus. And tell you more about this wonderful Savior. Who saved us sinners. And whose desire is to save every sinner.

Who comes to him. Please stay and have refreshments with us. Please come and join with us if you can. Christmas Day or next Sunday morning as well. But most of all.

[20 : 55] We trust that you'll have a wonderful, wonderful Christmas. We're going to sing one last carol. And after we've sung it. We're going to remain standing and sing. We wish you a Merry Christmas to one another. Okay. If we can manage that.

I think we'll all know that without the words. So we're going to sing 211. Oh little town of Bethlehem. Remain standing. And sing wish you a Merry Christmas.

And then opportunity to have some nibbles. O'er on the battle of Bethlehem.

O'er on the battle of Bethlehem. O'er on the battle of Bethlehem. O'er on the battle of Bethlehem.

O'er on the battle of Bethlehem. O'er on the battle of Bethlehem. O'er on the battle of Bethlehem.

O'er on the battle of Bethlehem. The stream, the sky and the stars will light.

Yet in the God's reach of the end, the everlasting light. The hopes and fears of the burdens are edging me tonight.

[22 : 14] O darling, stars together, you gave the holy birth.

And praises sing to God the King, and peace to their own earth.

O Christ is Lord of Mary, and gathered all the world.

While daughters sing, the angels sing, the watch of the King. O God, O God, O God, O God, O God, O God.

O God, O God, O God, O God.

[23 : 38] O God, O God, O God, O God. O God, O God, O God, O God, O God.

O God, O God, O God, O God.

Come to us, the mighty cross, the Lord Emmanuel. Let's sing We Wish You a Merry Christmas to one another.

Can we do it? We've got any music for that? Yes. We wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

The tidings we bring to you and your King, we wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

[25 : 11] We wish you a merry Christmas.