

Christmas Eve 2019

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[0:00] guitar solo guitar solo Amen. Good to see you all.

Welcome. Glad to see you. Merry Christmas Eve, I suppose, right? Merry Christmas! Amen. I want to open in a word of prayer, and then we'll begin our time together. Let's pray.

Lord, we're thankful for the excitement in this room right now for this time of year, for all that we have to celebrate, all that we have to look forward to. And so, Lord, we just ask for your blessings upon this time, that you'd be glorified by it, and prepare our hearts for our celebration of your birth, your incarnation.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, we're going to have a great time this evening, this Christmas Eve. We're going to sing some Christmas carols, also read as Passion Scripture. It's well-known, Luke chapter 2, and it'll be kind of intermittent between the songs.

Let's all stand as we sing. Joy to the world. Joy to the world. The Lord is come.

[2:02] Let earth receive her key. Let every heart prepare him room.

And heaven and nature sing. And heaven and nature sing. And heaven and heaven and nature sing.

Amen. Joy to the earth. Joy to the earth. The Savior reigns.

Let men their songs employ. From fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains, repeat the sounding joy.

Repeat, repeat the sounding joy. Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

[3:15] And no more let sins. No more let sins and sorrows grow.

Nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make his blessings flow.

Far as the curse is found. Far as far as the curse is found. Far as far as the curse is found.

Amen. He rules the world. He rules the world with truth and grace.

And makes the nations prove. The glories of his righteousness.

[4:22] And wonders of his love. And wonders of his love. And wonders, wonders of his love.

Let heaven and heaven and nature sing. Amen.

Amen. We read from Luke chapter 2, page 857 in the Pew Hymnal, as we read from starting in verse 1. In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

[5:37] All right. Let's go tell on the mountains. Think together. Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere.

Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born. While shepherds kept their watching, or silent flocks by night.

Behold, throughout the heavens, there shone a holy light. Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere.

Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born. Down in a lowly manger, the humble Christ was born.

And God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn. Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere.

[6:56] Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born. Continue on in the book of Luke 2, starting in verse 8.

In verse 14, I'd like for all of us to read that. I think we'll know what that is when we come to it. But starting in verse 8, it says this, And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

[8:04] Amen. Hark the herald angels sing. Hark the herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn King.

Peace on earth and mercy mild. God and sinners reconciled. Joyful all ye nations rise.

Join the triumph of the skies. With angelic hosts proclaim. Christ is born in Bethlehem.

Hark the herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn King. Christ by highest heaven adored.

Christ the everlasting Lord. Late in time behold him come. Offspring of the virgin's womb.

[9:12] Veiled in flesh the Godhead see. Hail the incarnate deity. Pleased as men with men to dwell.

Jesus our Emmanuel. Hark the herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn King.

Hail the heaven born Prince of Peace. Hail the Son of Righteousness. Light and alive to all he brings.

Risen with healing in his wings. Mild he lays his glory by. Born that man no more may die.

Born to raise the sons of earth. Born to give him second birth. Hark the herald angels sing.

[10:20] Glory to the newborn King. Amen. And Luke 2 continue on in 15.

When the angels went away from them into heaven. The shepherds said to one another. Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened. Which the Lord has made known to us.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph.

And the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it. They made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

But Mary treasured up all these things. Pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned.

Glorifying and praising God. For all they had heard and seen.

As it had been told them. Sing together. What child is this? What child is this? Who lay to rest?

[11:24] On Mary's lap is sleeping. Whom angels greet with anthems sweet.

While shepherds watch are keeping. This, this is Christ the King.

Whom shepherds guard and angels sing. Haste, haste to bring Him lot.

The babe, the son of Mary. Why lies me in such mean estate.

Where ox and lamb are feeding. Good Christian fear for sinners here.

[12:34] The silent word is pleading. Nail, spear shall pierce Him through.

The sun will be born for me, for you. Hail, hail the word made flesh.

The babe, the son of Mary. So bring Him incense. So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh.

Come peasant king to own him. The king of kings salvation brings.

Let loving hearts enthrone Him. Raise, raise the song on high.

[13:41] The virgin sings her lullaby. Joy, joy, joy for Christ is born.

The babe, the son of Mary. There it is. This is Christ the King. This, this is Christ the King.

Whom shepherds guard. Whom shepherds guard and angels sing. Haste, haste to bring Him, Lord.

The babe, the son of Mary. Amen. You may be seated.

Amen. Amen.

[14:43] This month we've been in the Gospel of Luke going through verse by verse through these scriptures that we've read tonight. So tonight I just wanted to bring a few more reflections about this text, about the incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and why we have so much reason to celebrate, not just at Christmas, but at all times throughout the year.

Each December we are reintroduced to the classic Christmas movies that many of us love and know so well, Christmas movies that range from the introspective to the comical. Movies like *It's a Wonderful Life*, *White Christmas*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *The Polar Express*, *The Santa Claus*, *Elf*, and one of my personal favorites.

Home Alone. These movies often serve as welcome distractions to our often chaotic, frenzied, and confused world.

But no matter how great they are and how classic they've become, they all fall short of the greatest story, which is the story of God Himself born as human to save us from our sins.

[16:07] J.I. Packer correctly stated that nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the incarnation. In a similar way, we might experience feelings of exuberance and sentimentality when we hear songs about being jolly or rocking around the Christmas tree.

But nothing comforts and encourages us as much as singing songs about the Word who became flesh. I've heard a lot over my time in ministry, pastors talking about what they're going to say now at Christmas.

And they're almost kind of distraught about, you know, what else can I say that I haven't already said before? And that kind of bothered me because what more needs to be said than what we have?

This is the greatest story of all stories. That's the wonder of God's Word in the incarnation. It's awesome and it's mysterious.

And we don't need anything else. We don't need to reboot this story. Even though few noticed his birth, Jesus didn't appear without warning.

[17:26] His coming had been foretold for centuries before his arrival. He just wasn't the type of king we expected. He entered the world through a virgin whose very body was fashioned by the baby she was about to deliver.

John 1, 1 through 3 says, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that has been made.

Jesus came not as the king we would have thought, in splendor, in glory, and in triumph, but as a helpless baby, sustained and nourished by an exhausted teenage mother.

The shepherds were understandably rattled by what they heard and saw that night that Jesus was born. But even more amazing than the dazzling display of angels filling the star-filled sky, declaring glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased, was the glory of that sight when they saw the Son of God himself, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laying in a manger of all places.

God's Son, born in a stable, surrounded by noxious fumes of animals, born to peasant parents. Here was a king these shepherds understood that they could identify with because he was willing to identify with them.

[18:56] Besides them, the rest of the world was unaware that such hope had suddenly burst the bonds of despair, that the Savior of the world had come, that God was in fact with us.

What did it mean for God to come to us? How far did he have to go? If you've ever traveled as a foreigner in another country, you know what it's like to encounter a people with a new language, with a new landscape, with new customs, new money even, and a new culture.

And if you've experienced that, you've experienced what it's like to feel so out of place. And so we wonder what it must have felt like for him. But he left the comforts of heaven behind in order to come to serve his people.

And he did so by living, by dying, and by rising again for our salvation. This king was unlike any other before him or any king ever since.

At the incarnation, the infinite became an infant. The all-knowing one became a babbling baby. As one song puts it, the author climbed inside the page.

[20:10] God came to us because we never would have come to him. We never could have come to him. We never would have wanted to come to him. But God didn't just come to us.

He became one of us. Jesus was not only our Emmanuel, God, with us. He was one of us. God was made low so that he could raise us up to eternal life and infinite joy.

When Jesus became a baby, he lost nothing of his godness. He was truly God and truly man in one person. Even as he slept asleep soundly on the hay as a human, he was at the same time holding

together the universe as God.

It's a source of unending wonder that the God who brought the universe into being clothed himself in our skin, or more precisely, added human nature to his deity.

God is great not merely because he is sovereign and exalted above creation, but because in unspeakable humility he was willing to become a part of it.

[21 : 18] For centuries, people have tried to remake Christmas into a charming children's tale that inspires us to be kinder, more peaceful, and more loving.

But the true story of Christmas has a different message. It's because we fail time and again so miserably to fully experience these things in the world and within ourselves that God had to act if there could ever be any hope for us.

And he did. In the early chapters of the Bible, God promised that the head of the serpent would be crushed by the future offspring of Eve. He told a wandering Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him.

Later, he promised David that the throne of his kingdom would be established forever. And all of this would come to pass because God's suffering servant would be pierced for our transgressions and he would be crushed for our iniquities.

And so it's no wonder as Jesus was meeting with his disciples for the last time before his crucifixion and his resurrection that he had these very important words to share with them.

[22 : 35] We all know that we want peace. We understand that we should be kind. And around Christmas time, we display that for a while.

But then January comes, February, March, right? Taxes come due. We're not so happy and jolly as we used to be. That peace that was there has faded.

God's peace is different. Listen to what Jesus said in John 14, 27. Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.

Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid. That promise and many others came true throughout the course of Jesus' life, especially on that first Christmas day.

And they assure us that God will keep every promise that he's ever given to us in his word. He will save anyone who calls on the name of his son, Jesus Christ.

[23 : 37] He will make sure in his perfect time that we become more like his son. He will cause all things in our lives and in this world to work together for the good. And one day, he will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

Death will be no more, and we will see his face. Let's not let the world's misunderstandings of Christmas keep us from seeing and treasuring the greatest of all realities.

God has been made low in order to bring us to heights that we'd never arrive at without him. Emmanuel has come to be with us.

The promises have all come true. He has come just as his word promised. And just as his word promises that he will come again, so he will.

And we have plenty reason to celebrate Christmas, do we not? Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for this time that we've had to spend together, to be reminded through song and through scripture of your coming, of the reason that we have to celebrate Christmas.

[24 : 50] God, we know that we desire peace, but we see time and time again that man is incapable of sustaining it, yet you came to give us a greater peace, a peace that surpasses understanding, a peace that knows no end.

And so we're so thankful to serve a God who is willing to serve us by coming to us, by adding flesh to his deity, by living the perfect sinless life that we are incapable of living, by willingly dying on the cross in our place for our sins and rising again on the third day as proof that your payment was sufficient, that your words are true, that you are the everlasting, eternal Son of God.

And as you ascended to the right hand of the Father, Lord, where you are today, we know and we believe that you will come back, just as you promised that you would come the first time, you've promised that you will come again.

And so, Lord, I pray that as we leave from this place, in just a few moments, that Father, you would remind us of this incredible joy and peace that we have through Jesus Christ as we celebrate the birth of your Son.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's sing together, Way in a Manger. Way in a Manger
Away in a Manger No crib for a bed The little Lord Jesus Lay down His sweet head The stars in the
sky Look down where He lay The little Lord Jesus Asleep on the hay Be near me, Lord Jesus I ask
Thee to stay Close by me forever And love me, I pray Bless all the dear children
[26 : 58] In Thy tender care And fit us for heaven To live with Thee there Silent night Holy night All
is calm All is bright Round yon virgin Mother and child Holy infant So tender and mild Sleep in
heavenly peace Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night Holy night Love, Son of God Love's pure light Radiant beams Radiant beams Radiant
beams From Thy holy face With the dawn Of redeeming grace Jesus, Lord, Thy birth Jesus, Lord
Thy birth Silent night Silent night Holy night Wondrous star Lend Thy light
Thy light Pray the angels Let us sing Let us sing Alleluia to our King Christ the Savior The Savior is
born Christ the Savior is born Christ the Savior is born Amen Amen Let's close in prayer Lord God
Thank you so much For this time That we've had To be together again To be reminded Of your son
Jesus Christ And his incarnation As we leave this place Lord we pray That you would bless us As
we gather With our friends And family And as we celebrate Your coming And as we look forward To
your soon return
We love you And we ask this In Jesus name Amen Merry Christmas