

He has spoken to us by his Son

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Preacher: David Trimble

[0 : 0 0] So I wonder what your favorite part of the Christmas season is. For me, it's an excuse to eat loads of sprouts, which I feel is a very underrated vegetable. And also watch a whole lot of movies, especially Christmas films, without wanting to open up the debate too much about which Christmas movie is the best, though it is The Muppets Christmas Carol, just for clarification.

I want to do a little experiment. If you were a Martian, hypothetically, or perhaps a spaceman came traveling to be a bit more Christmassy, and you knew nothing about Christmas at all, I wonder what you'd think Christmas was all about, just from looking at the kind of movies that we watch at Christmas.

Because those are the Christmas stories that we tell, right? So our hypothetical spaceman, the Wi-Fi is really good in his flying saucer. He's able to connect all the various streaming services that there are, and he browses all the various festive favorites.

As he sits in his spaceship and watches through Christmas classics and Christmas clunkers, I wonder what he would conclude the Christmas story is all about.

And I wonder who he would say is the main character of the Christmas story. In terms of what the story is all about, I reckon he concludes something like this, that the Christmas story is about being kind because people have value.

[1 : 3 2] That's, in many ways, the modern Christmas message and the heart of the modern Christmas story. We see it in It's a Wonderful Life, as George Bailey realizes the impact he has on all around him.

It's the story of the various iterations of A Christmas Carol, as Scrooge is reformed from nasty to nice. It's not a bad message. It's pretty good. Our spaceman might also conclude that Christmas is a time when people fall in love, because Christmas is full of films like Love Actually, or The Holiday, or A Christmas Prince, or Last Christmas, or insert whichever Netflix rom-com has been added this season.

It's not my favorite kind of Christmas movie, but for those who love it, I'm really glad you do. And when it comes to the central character in the Christmas story, well, there's only one answer, really.

It's Santa Claus, or as those old-fashioned types among us might call him, Father Christmas. From the miracle on 34th Street to the Santa Claus, from the snowman to the nightmare before Christmas, from Arthur Christmas to Elf, Father Christmas would appear to be the beating heart of Christmas.

Which is interesting, really, because the Bible, where the Christmas story originates, centers not so much on a father, but on a son. The heart of the Christmas story, as the Bible tells it, is on the birth of God's son, Jesus, and his arrival into the world.

[3 : 0 3] Over the next few minutes, I want to use that last reading we've had, I'll use it as a springboard, to think about the Son of God as the real and better heart of the Christmas story.

And I know there's going to be a whole mix of opinions in the room. And the big split in opinion surely is going to be on that question of whether Jesus is actually the Son of God, or whether he was just a man like any other.

And what I want us to think about is how Jesus being the Son of God actually is the real and better heart of the Christmas story. And if true, offers us a much better Christmas story.

Because it's a story that has real consequences for us, and actually has the power to change our lives. The Christmas story that we find in the Gospels tells us that Jesus was born in first century Palestine, in Bethlehem.

He was born to a young virgin called Mary, but his father Joseph was not his biological dad. He was, as the angel Gabriel put it in our first reading from Matthew, conceived by the Holy Spirit.

[4 : 13] And so the Christmas story is a claim that 2,000 years ago, there was a child who was born who was both human and divine. That is, the Bible claims that Jesus was both the Son of Man and the Son of God.

And what these first few lines of the letter to the Hebrews asks is, why did the Son of God come? And what did the Son of God do?

Because that's the key question, isn't it? If Jesus truly is the Son of God, why did he come? The first part of that answer is that he is the definitive messenger from God, the definitive word from heaven.

In the past, says our writer, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son.

Now Christmas, it's often a time for reconnecting with friends and family, for sending cards and gifts, sharing news, catching up with each other after a busy year. It's a perfect time to hear from those we love how things are going.

[5 : 30] The first Christmas was all about the sending of the definitive and perfect messenger. God the Father sending his one and only Son into the world.

God has spoken before through prophets and signs, but no prophet, no angel even, could compare to his one and only Son.

And this is why Jesus is worth listening to. If he is the Son of God, what he has to say is going to be important and actually is going to be definitive.

Of course, sometimes folks will wonder why, in many ways naturally, if God wants people to know him, why he doesn't make himself more clear. He has.

The sending of his Son is actually the clearest message that he could have possibly sent. Because the Son of God is the best representation, the clearest representation of God to humanity.

[6 : 36] At Christmas, Christians naturally tend to think about Jesus, the baby in the manger. When a new baby is born, people can't help but try and point out that the baby has mom's eyes or dad's big nose or her granddad's scowl, whatever it might be, whether or not those characteristics are really there or not.

But it is a biological fact. It is why we look for this, that children will end up looking like their parents, for better or for worse. And if that is true of the Son of God, well, he bears his mother's humanity.

He is truly human. But he also bears all the marks of his Father in heaven. And the writer of the Hebrews tells us why that is important.

It's because he shows humanity all the fullness of God. He says God has appointed him heir of all things. And particularly an heir to a royal throne has that particular responsibility of representing the king.

If God is king, then Jesus is his heir. And so, without wanting to dip my toe too far into monarchical issues, given a certain Netflix documentary doing the rounds, because King Charles is unable to go to every single royal engagement, he often has to send various folks in his stead.

[7 : 59] And so, if the Prince of Wales is attending royal engagements, he is there representing his father, because he is the heir. And this is exactly what Jesus does in being born.

He represents God the Father as his heir, come as his ambassador to earth. And as he represents God, well, we see God truly in him.

And that's the claim made when our writer says the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being. Jesus was human.

He looked human. He had a human mind. He had a human body. He had a human will. But in a way that's actually quite hard to grasp, he was also God.

Even in his humanity, Jesus Christ radiates the glory of the eternal God and represents him exactly. And when we see Jesus, we're actually seeing God.

[9 : 04] He is God. And that's why we sing in the carol, O come all ye faithful, God of God, light of light. Lo, he abhors not the virgin's womb, very God, begotten not created.

O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord. Jesus, when we see him, he shows us God. Of course, if that's true, and I hold that it is, that means Jesus is very much worth looking at as we see him in the Bible.

Because if he really does reveal God to humanity, then it's worth properly looking at what he said and what he's done. Because if these things are true, the implications are absolutely massive.

Our writer to the Hebrews tells us as much when he says that through Jesus, God made the universe. Though Jesus is the heir, he's also so much more than that.

He and his father are equal in power. And Jesus himself was involved in the very creation of the whole universe. Which makes it even wilder when one considers what it means for him to come to earth in frail flesh.

[10 : 22] Because the writer to the Hebrews also tells us that Jesus has the responsibility of sustaining all things by his powerful word. This means that the son of God, who is the creator of all things, and the one who ensures that the universe continues to be and keeps on ticking, subjected himself to becoming a baby.

And then growing up in a dead-end village in northern Palestine. And then teaching people who he is and what he came to do. And then finally, choosing to die for those people as they rejected him, as they spat on him, and as they executed him.

The creator of the whole world, willingly subjecting himself to all the hardships of this world. And we all know that this life is full of hardships.

And willingly subjecting himself to the cruelty of humanity and the agonizing death on a Roman cross. Because the Christmas story is more than just the baby in the manger.

It covers hundreds of years of anticipation building up to the birth of Jesus. We call this the Old Testament. And then it also covers what the baby grew up to do.

[11 : 45] And the short version is that he grew up to die a shockingly gruesome death. Naked and ashamed as his own people mocked him.

Why? And the more you look at the Bible's Christmas story, the more you realize just how different it is from the Christmas movies that we tend to stick on on a Christmas evening.

The tone in many ways is much more somber. The shocks are a lot greater. And the main character is not some whimsical elf who lives at the North Pole and advertises Coca-Cola.

But he's the son of God lying in a wooden manger and hanging on a wooden cross. And so this raises the question, what ultimately is the point of Christmas?

Because whilst I love the heartwarming message of kindness, human value, and true love at Christmas time, I love watching it in those films, I also find when they're presented like that, I find them to be rather surface-level messages, especially in the way they're pulped and packaged for maximum profit.

[12 : 56] When I come to the Bible's Christmas story, I find something much more, something that gives me hope, something that grounds me and helps me to understand my deepest needs.

And it's all tied up in that question of what did the Son of God actually come to do? And it's this question that the writer to the Hebrews is addressing when he says, after he, Jesus, had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

And so he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. Unpacking this a little, what the Son of God came to do is to bring humanity back to God.

The Bible speaks of a gap, a gap that exists between God and humanity, a gap that is of humanity's own making, a broken relationship between creature and creator.

And the reason given for that is what the Bible calls sin. What is sin? Most people's understanding of sin is that it's the bad things that we do.

[14 : 12] And that is true, but it's also so much more than that and also so much worse than that. Sin is a state whereby we actually find we don't do the good that we know that we ought to and we keep doing the bad stuff that we know we shouldn't.

Sin is the state whereby we can't escape our imperfections and our moral failures. It's not that we don't do good things, it's that we can't stop doing bad things.

We can never be perfect no matter what we do, no matter how hard we try. And even more than that, it's a state of separation from God.

And it's the reason our world, though there is so much beauty in it, is so messed up. It's the reason Ukrainian children won't have a happy Christmas.

It's the reason companies have put profits before people and wealth before the world and the environment. It's the reason relationships break down. It's the reason we all often have a nagging sense that we've wasted our lives or a fear that we will.

[15 : 31] This is why God hates sin. It's not about arbitrary rules that we find in the Bible. It's about the fact that when we are stained with sin, as the Bible says we all are, we mess things up with grave consequences.

sin is not kind. It is cruel. It's destructive. So that's why our writer says after Jesus had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

The point that the writer is making is the thing Jesus came to do is he came to sort out the sin problem. That's why he was born as a baby in Bethlehem.

It's why he died at the hands of Roman soldiers. It was all to deal with sin. And this is why Christmas means so, so much to Christians throughout the world.

At Christmas we remember why Jesus came and sacrificed so much, gave up so much by entering the world. At Christmas we remember that he came to save the world.

[16 : 43] world. The final bit of our short reading from Hebrews tells us that Jesus right now is reigning in heaven at the right hand of his father and has been given the name of the father as his successful and victorious heir.

Or to put it another way, he did it. He dealt with sin. He won the victory. He rose again defeating death and now he sits in heaven and has promised that he's going to come again.

The Christmas story centers rightly on the first advent of the son of God. But in many ways you can't talk about the first advent without mentioning the second. The first advent was the son of God coming to deal with sin and bring us back to God.

The second will be the time when he comes again and all the effects of sin that I mentioned earlier will be totally eradicated and when all will be made well.

No more war, no more tears, no more anxieties. And this is the message of Christmas. A hope that Jesus will come once more and make everything right.

[18 : 01] So this Christmas I wonder what your hopes are. Do you have a hope? Looking at the world around us, it can be easy to have very little hope at all.

To hope maybe very simply that we'll be able to get by in life unscathed whilst holding very loosely to that secular Christmas message of kindness, value, and true love.

A message which I wonder when tragedy strikes can feel rather hollow and without foundations. But in the actual Christmas story, centered on the coming of the Son of God, those messages of kindness, of human value, and love actually all find a foundation.

They find a greater and truer fulfillment in the Son of God. He is God's perfect kindness to us.

He values all people for he made all people. Jesus came for all people and wants all people to believe in him and find in him the deliverance from the sin that plagues us.

[19 : 12] And he is the fullest expression of God's true love to a people who tend to hate him and ignore him. So this Christmas, as you cozy up around the fire and watch your favorite festive film together, have a think about the story it tells.

And then have a think about the story that we get here in the Bible. A story of God's Son giving up everything to show us God and bring us back to him.

A story of hardship, poverty, and death, but also a story of life triumphant and the hope of a perfect future. And a story which you are invited into to be a part of.

Because not only is it a better Christmas story, it's also true. The Son of God came for you and he wants to know you this Christmas.

He wants you to believe in him and receive all the wonderful blessings of knowing the Son of God. Come and behold him, born the King of Angels.

[20 : 29] O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord. Amen. Amen.