



Christmas Day

25 December 2021

Scriptures

Old Testament Isaiah 52:7-10 and Psalm 98

New Testament – Letters Hebrews 1:1-4 (5-12)

New Testament – Gospel John 1:1-14

Theme

Jesus Makes All the Difference – The Transcendence

Call to worship

(Welcome people to worship and then read Psalm 98)

On Christmas Day 2021, may we realise that Jesus coming into our world transcends all other events and makes all the difference in our lives. As we worship, let us offer up our lives to him, keeping nothing in reserve. As a new year dawns, let us be captured by the presence of his Holy Spirit and like the shepherds and the wise men that first Christmas night, leave all else aside to worship him in spirit and in the truth that all of our days are held in his hands.

Songs

Opening

O Come, all ye Faithful (SASB 116/496)

O come let us adore him (sing chorus again, slowly this time and with the additional words: For he alone is worthy)

Midway

Silent Night (124/842)

Response

Beautiful Lord, Wonderful Saviour (355/867)

This song captures the heart of our focus over this Advent season – Jesus makes all the difference. He is the Lord of life and the Saviour of the world. We give our hearts to him and are amazed that he calls us and sets us apart for his service. Not only that, but he moulds and makes something beautiful of our lives for his glory.

Sending Out

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (108/270)

Children

The wonder of it all

Visual: Ask the children to come forward with their 'one' Christmas present and engage with them in a Christmas Day show and tell. Then talk about Jesus being the gift that transcends all others.

Message

Action: Ask people what they think is the most meaningful Christmas present they have ever received. (5 minutes)

The gift of Jesus transcends all other gifts. It is the one personal gift that existed as a gift to us before we even received it and continues as a gift forever. It's like God's gift that keeps on giving. You would have noticed the tone of rejoicing and acclamation in today's Old Testament readings. The prophet and the psalmist are both reaching forward to the day that Jesus comes into the world and salvation becomes possible for all people.

It's the same reason there was so much rejoicing happening on the night Jesus was born. 'Do not be afraid,' the angel said to the shepherds who were tending their sheep outside Bethlehem. 'I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord' (Luke 2:10-11). The birth of Jesus is a monumental and pivotal event in history and on this Christmas morning we're going to take a look at the reasons why.

1. A new day for humanity

First, with the birth of Jesus Christ, God began a new era for humankind. As our gospel reading says, 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). Let us be in awe of what happened that first Christmas. The Word of God became flesh and made his dwelling among us! God joined us on Earth and began revolutionising human life.

God was and still is ‘making all things new’, to quote the Apostle Paul who travelled around the Roman Empire announcing this message. It started with the miracle that took place inside the womb of Mary, enacted by the Holy Spirit. God was renewing life from the start of life and the great news for us is that this action of God was permanent. In every generation people can experience the new day for themselves. It is the day of our salvation.

2. A new light (v 9)

Second, with the birth of Jesus Christ, God shone a new light on and in humanity. This is a powerful underpinning of the focus of our Advent series – that Jesus makes all the difference. Verse nine of our gospel reading says, ‘The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.’ As God in the flesh Jesus is also the light of the world, a title He claimed later during his ministry in Palestine. ‘I AM the Light of the World,’ he said, unequivocally. ‘Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’ (John 8:12).

This is the profound impact of Jesus coming into our world. No longer do we live in darkness, drift aimlessly or exist without hope or are powerless over darkness. The light has come and shown us a new way to live – the Kingdom of God way. It is the way of love, empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is the way articulated by Jesus’ teaching that has been captured for every generation in the gospels. Its greatest priorities are to love God and love your neighbour.

This is the light by which we now live. Of course, darkness still exists and we can actually feel it around us sometimes. And despite having the light of Jesus Christ and carrying the light within us, the darkness can still threaten our wellbeing and futures. There still exists a struggle with darkness, particularly if we reject the light or allow it to dim and flicker.

The key is to let God deal with the darkness and not try to take it on ourselves. We live in the light, we carry the light around with us, we shine the light of Jesus in dark places, including the dark places of our past. It’s a choice. We say yes to the light and no to the darkness that may still lurk in the shadows of our lives and in our communities.

3. A new identity and a new journey (v 12)

Third, with the birth of Jesus Christ, God gave humanity the opportunity to receive a new identity and begin a new journey. Verses 12 and 13 of our gospel reading say, ‘To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.’

Our new identity is as children of God. We enter into the incarnation of Jesus Christ and are born of the Holy Spirit, like Jesus was born of the Spirit. And this new birth for us is not done and dusted overnight. It is the process of becoming – we ‘become’ the children of God. It is at once the journey of a lifetime and the journey that takes the rest of our lives.

The main focus or goal of this journey is becoming like Jesus. We enter into his life and mission and he shapes and moulds us into the likeness of God. Our character takes on the character

of God – a character marked by holiness and love. We participate with Jesus in his mission of salvation for the world. We become God in the flesh – the hands, the face and the voice of God in the world.

In case you're thinking God couldn't possibly include you among those who take the journey of becoming like Jesus, the Gospel of John clearly articulates that this new identity and this new journey are for all people – no matter what your past, how bad or no good you think you are, what your current circumstances might be, or where you come from. Jesus makes all the difference in the lives of those who say 'yes' to him. It's a new day, with a new identity and a new journey for whoever chooses it.

Response

Christmas Day is a good opportunity for either a new start or a fresh start with Jesus. We can let the awe of that first Christmas wash over us, and join the shepherds, wise men and angels and come humbly before him knowing that the gift of Jesus transcends all others. We can say with the songwriter, 'Beautiful Lord, Wonderful Saviour, I know for sure all of my days are held in your hand, crafted into your perfect plan.'

About the writer

Major Peter McGuigan is a Salvation Army officer writer who has served in corps and communications appointments, both in Australia and internationally. He has also served as Chair of the The Salvation Army's Moral and Social Issues Council and, ecumenically, as President of the Australasian Religious Press Association. The writer of several books and a substantive body of feature and opinion articles, Peter holds an MA (Writing) and is currently a corps officer in Melbourne.