
Our Lord is Born This Day

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 25 December 2024

Isaiah 52:7-10 • Hebrews 1:1-12 • John 1:1-14



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Glory in the highest! Our Lord and Saviour is born this day!

Jesus is our light and our salvation. His light shines in our darkness and cannot be overcome. He lives eternally with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, one God in heaven and earth.

When he became incarnate and was born on earth that day long ago, his own people, the people who were all created through him, did not know him, and did not expect him. There was a tradition and prophecies, most notably through Micah and Isaiah, about a Messiah to come, who would set his people free. The prophets were right — a Messiah was born on that long-ago day, but when he came, they didn't recognise him, and they rejected him. His death on the cross was the start of the great spread of Christianity around the world, which continues to this day.

Christmas is a joyous time, a time of families and friends getting together, a time of children's smiles and laughter and anticipation, a time of parties and celebrations. The true joy which you see around you comes from the love we have for each other. Yes, there is hype; yes, there is commercialism; yes, there is money being spent which cannot really be afforded. But we focus on that too much, I think. As long as we keep a proper perspective on the holiday, we will not go wrong.

In among the shops and the shopping, the lines and the traffic, the parties and the presents, God is with us. It is not a bad thing to buy presents; remember, the Wise Men brought presents to the baby in the manger. Love can be expressed through material things. We live in a material society. I'm not a Grinch about Christmas; I enjoy the present-giving and the special music and the excitement about getting together with friends and family. Consumerism will always be with us, as long as we are basically a capitalistic society. But I wonder sometimes what place Jesus still holds in our hearts. Do we know him, or have we become like those people of his time on earth? You see, I don't want to paint this as an either/or situation. Every year we read articles about how Christmas has become commercialised, that in our shopping and our partying and our money-spending we have lost the true meaning of Christmas. But the shops and the parties aren't to blame, and there's nothing wrong with having a party or going shopping. All we need to do is remember why Christ came to be born on this earth. It's all about priorities.

Jesus says that the two greatest commandments are to love your God with all your heart and soul and your neighbour as you love yourself. In the long years since humans first walked the earth, God has loved us and has wanted us to respond in love. Many did; many did not. Other gods got in the way, literal gods of whom the people made idols, or figurative gods of wealth and power. There always seemed to be something in the way of putting God first. Jesus talks about this in the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, when all the invited guests found other things to do, rather than answer God's call to share his bounty. Obstacles to God can take many forms, from other people to work to leisure activities. To put God first may require a change in your way of thinking. It is primarily a mindset, a consciousness that we are every moment in the presence of God, and God knows our every thought, idea and prayer, better than we know ourselves. God knows us better than we know ourselves.

Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and his subsequent ministry through Judea was a wake-up call. God called his people back to an awareness of their true existence as his children. "Look to me," God says. "All life is from me, and I give life in abundance." Why would anyone reject that call? "All love is from me, and I have loved you since before you were born." On this day, this day of Jesus' birth, we remember that God loved us so much, that he sent his only Son to us.

Loving God is not an obligation. God does not force our love, although he desires it. But when I look at what my Lord has done for me, I want to respond in love. I

cannot ever repay what God has given me: life; health; friends; my wife; a beautiful place to live; work for the day; rest for the night. Most of all, a continual presence and care, no matter what I do, no matter how many mistakes I make. God is with me. The arc of my life has forever changed, since I accepted my Lord into my life. This opportunity for communion with God was only made possible by the thing that we celebrate today: the birth, as a baby, of our God in the stable at Bethlehem. We can all trace what we call our Christian life back to that time two thousand years ago when God came to earth.

Greater things than this followed, in the ministry of Jesus Christ and the sacrifice he made for us at Calvary. But this was the beginning, the amazing moment when God entered his creation in order to recall us to himself and guide us into the way we are to go. As you go about your holiday plans, enjoying the time with family, exchanging gifts and sharing lovely meals, pause occasionally and give thanks to God for his great Christmas present to all us — the birth of his precious Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.