“PEACE ... to all mankind!”

(Are you wanting peace this Christmas?)

SHINE Christmas Series – Week 2

9.30a.m. Sunday 24 December, 2017

Delivered by Senior Pastor Marshall Muller @
the Laidley Baptist Church (Qld).

Skitguys – The First Noel (3 mins 20 secs)

Introduction

If I was to give you one gift this Christmas, what do you think it would be? I’ve brought it here today all wrapped up. (Get one of the children to open the gift).

I love Christmas, I love the trees and decorations, lightshows, the different yummy foods, the carols playing in the shops, family getting together, the Christmas holidays – I love everything about Christmas. Bring it on I say!

I don’t complain about the crowded shops or the lines at the registers, or people clamouring over the food aisles or the toy aisles.

I love Christmas.

I love it because somewhere someone will ask the Christmas questions –

“What’s the big deal about the baby in the manger?”
“Who was he?”
“What does his birth have to do with me or Christmas?”
The questioner may be a young child, or a teenager trying to find the real truth, or a mother who is holding her child for the first time this Christmas.

I remember asking these sorts of questions. I remember my Dad saying when I was a boy – “Christmas is about Christ”.

In one way or another, I have been asking the Christmas questions ever since. I love the answers I have found along the way.

What about this one? God knows what it is like to be a human. When things are happening thick & fast or when my life is full of difficult deadlines, He understands. He’s been there.

Because of Bethlehem, I know that I have a Saviour in heaven. As Max Lucado mentions in his book ‘Because of Bethlehem’ … Christmas begins what Easter celebrates. The child in the cradle became the King on the cross.

Because he did this there is no black marks on my record.

Just grace. There’s no fine print or exclusion clauses on his contract – just grace.

He didn’t tell me to clean my act up before I come in. NO … He offered to come in and I’ll clean you up. We get it all wrong. It’s not my grip on Him that matters … but His grip on you & me.

Christmas presents from Santa … yes, that’s nice and cool. But the perpetual presence of Christ? That’s life changing! His constant peace – that’s what I’m sure of in my heart.

God is always near us, for us, and is us.

We may forget Him, but God will never forget us. We are always and forever on His mind and we are always and forever in His plans.

Not only that, in Matthew 1:23 He calls himself ‘Immanuel’ – what does that mean?

It means, ‘God with us’ … always.

Notice it doesn’t say “God made us’, or ‘God thinks of us’, or ‘God above us’.
But God with us – at the office on the plane, in the kitchen, down the street. Jesus, the child born to save us, walked this earth and breathed this air.

God with us!

At this time in history we need this message more than ever. Threats of nuclear war, jobs going down the gurgler, anxious times, confusion and depression in our communities, survival of the fittest and the richest, the violence the attacks, the senseless bloodshed. The banks and their potential bank interest rate rises and the value of stocks. The shepherds might’ve stayed up all night watching their flocks by night, but many of us cant sleep at night because we are watching our stocks by night, worried about our superannuation...

And there’s more.

The job that you are trying to do, not knowing if the boss will let you go next week. The cancer or illness that threatens to come back at any time. The marriage you can’t fix. The family that you wish would understand you. The boss you can’t please. The outstanding debt you wish you could climb over.

We need this message more than ever that God ... is ... with ... us.

It reminds me of the Christmas play and the boy who played the part of the angel in the Christmas pageant. He rehearsed his lines with his Mother over and over. “It is I; don’t be afraid.” “It is I; don’t be afraid.” “It is I; don’t be afraid.”

When the Christmas play began and he stepped onto the stage and saw all the people in the audience and the lights, he froze. After what seemed like an eternity of silence, he spoke (finally) saying, “It is me and I’m scared”.

Many of us are scared. Can I say that many in our world are scared.

Are you scared? If so, can I suggest that you need a little Christmas. (and I don’t mean egg nog or Christmas tree chocolates). That’s not Christmas!
Christmas (as my Dad told me) is about Christ. 6 of the 9 letters of the word Christmas is Christ. It isn’t Santa-mas or shopping-mas or holiday-mas or Stuff your face with food-mas. It’s CHRIST-mas

Mention Festivus from a 1997 episode of Seinfeld. It is an anti-Christmas festival for those who don’t believe. Sort of like a Festivus for the rest of us. One of their script writers held it as their family tradition and so they wrote it into the Seinfeld show.

Festivus has rules. It’s celebrated on December 23. 1. You buy and erect an aluminium pole (you can get this from Bunnings). 2. Everyone gathers for a Festivus dinner. 3. It incorporates a segment called ‘Airing of grievances’ where basically you tell everyone why they tick you off and what they’ve done wrong. 4. They participate in ‘Feats of Strength’ (where you show off how strong you are).

When I heard about the Festivus for the rest of us, I felt sad. Yes, it is a gathering in December for families and friends, but where is the peace, hope, joy & love? It’s mostly the opposite of the Christmas that I have known from a young boy when my Dad said, ‘Christmas is about Christ’.

Boy, we do need a little Christmas, don’t we?

We do need this message more than ever that God … is … with … us.

But it’s more than that. I don’t mean the hurrying and the scurrying of the season. I mean the promise of the season.

God gets us. God saves us.

That’s the message. God is always near us. It may have started with a silent night in Bethlehem, but Jesus has promised us Act 2 – the skies will open and the the trumpet will sound, a new kingdom will commence. He will empty all of the tombs, death will melt.

He will come alongside us and press his thumb against our cheeks and wipe away every tear. He will command every sorrow, sickness, cancer and illness to “Begone”. Death will die, Life will reign.

As we see the manger of the Christmas scene, it invites all of us to dare to believe that the best is yet to be. And in our lives it could all begin today.
But if it doesn’t, there is a reason. His reason.

I mean, look at the Bethlehem birth. The trouble and hassle of returning to a royal census. Being forced to travel, the expense of finding accommodation and food while travelling, full hotels, late in the night, pregnant wife … on a donkey (maybe).

The whole thing was one big hassle. Yet, out of the hassle, the hope and peace of the world was born.

It still is.

In the words of Ann Voskamp in her book ‘The Greatest Gift’:

You always get your Christmas miracle. You get God with you...
Christ is all your good, Christ is all your peace, and He is all yours, and this is always all your miracle.
No matter the bareness you feel, you can always have as much of Jesus as you want.

You may feel that you don’t have hope or peace right now. None of us like the hassles of life. But the Christmas story, the Christmas miracle is that you can always have as much of Jesus as you want. Unlike chocolate, Jesus is non-fattening!

But I love Christmas because it reminds us how, ”God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God.” (Romans 8:28)

Long after the presents are put into a cupboard and the wrapping paper is thrown into the wheelie bin, long after the guest have left, and the Christmas tree & lights are put away for another year … long after all this, the promises of Christmas and Christ endure.

Amid all the distractions this festive season, perhaps we could all use some Christmas this Christmas.

As each of us curl up and look into the wonderful story of Bethlehem and the birth of the Prince of peace, we too may find a lifetime of hope, joy & peace.
Are you wanting peace this Christmas?

Christ-mas … Jesus brings each of us long-lasting and eternal peace. Nothing else will.

I pray that each of us will get a little more of Christ and Christ-mas this Christmas season

In the words of Corrie Ten Boom (a Prisoner of War captured/tortured by the Nazis) …

*What can any of us add to Christmas?? (Nothing really)*

*The perfect motive is that God so loved the world.*

*The perfect gift is that he gave his only Son.*

*The only requirement is to believe in Him.*

*The reward of faith is that you shall have everlasting life … life in it’s fullest.*

Perhaps in the midst of all the busyness of our Christ-mas this season, we might get a chance for the next few minutes to peer in the manger to ask ‘What child is this?’

*Let’s pray …*

*Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for Christmas where we remember the birth of Jesus, the Saviour of the world. Help us to find the answers we are looking for in our lives by peering into the manger and realizing that the greatest gift was given to us. That because of Bethlehem, we have a saviour in heaven.*

*Today, Jesus, as the Prince of Peace, that you would visit every house and home and remind us that you bring a lifetime and perfect gift of hope, joy and peace.*

*For those today who need your peace, may you reveal yourself to us as the one who brings the answers to the hassles of life. May this Christmas be different for us. May it be filled with rest and love for one another because of Bethlehem. Because of Jesus.*

*May we go from this place now filled with your Spirit knowing that for every believer this time is sacred, that the Word became flesh and moved into our neighbourhood. Amen.*

**Closing Song – O Holy Night**
1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.  
2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)  
3 And everyone went to their own town to register.  

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.  
5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.  
6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,  
7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.  

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.  
9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.  
10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.  
11 Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.  
12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”  

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,  

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”  

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”  

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.  
17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,  
18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.  
19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.  
20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.