

## **Luke 2: 1-20 with Isaiah 9: 2-7 Christmas 2024**

Prayer: Lord enlighten our hearts with your message of good news this morning. In the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ whose birth we celebrate today. Amen.

*I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people!*

What good news would you like to hear? What good news do you think all the people of the world want to hear today??

Back in 2020 and again in 2021 we probably would have yelled out – we long for an end to COVID!

This year I think we long to hear that there is peace throughout the world. That finally the war in Ukraine and in the middle east would end! Wouldn't it be great to hear news of world leaders working together in harmony for the good of all people.

So many people throughout the world live in fear and struggle to find hope. There is always darkness somewhere, in the form of conflict, illness and disease, natural disasters, power and greed and abuse, loneliness, hopelessness... In contrast, today I pray that you will hear and receive a message of real hope.

For behold...I bring you good news of great joy! Even if you haven't been reading the good news in the bible, you have probably heard it in carols you have sung or listened to. I missed most of my favourite Carols by Candlelight on the TV last night, but I caught the end of Carols in the Domain on Saturday night, and the peoples favourite carol and the final one sung for the night was one of my favourites too...O Holy Night. It speaks of hope in the birth of Christ.

*Oh, holy night the stars are brightly shining, it is the night of our dear Saviour's birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining, 'til he appeared, and the soul felt it's worth. A thrill of **hope** the weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks, a new and glorious morn.*

The world was weary when Jesus arrived, longing for hope, just like we are now. The Jews were waiting for the Messiah to come and deliver them from darkness, and at that time from Roman rule. At Jesus' birth there was a thrill of hope, a new beginning.

Isaiah the prophet had brought a message of good news to a people walking in darkness that one day a child would be born, a son given to them who would reign forever on their great King David's throne. He would be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.

The people waited a long time for this good news to come to fruition...about 700 long years!

They waited and they waited, they hoped, and they hoped and in God's perfect timing the good news finally arrived that their Messiah had come.

The coming of the Saviour was all in God's control and his plan. At an unexpected time and in a most unexpected way!

The Messiah was coming as a vulnerable baby.

Luke tells us that *in those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world...And everyone went to their own town to register.*

Caesar Augustus was an immensely powerful man, and I am sure he'd like to take credit for all that was going on. But God was the one really in control, ensuring that the prophecies about where the Messiah was to be born would be fulfilled. You see Joseph was a descendant of King David and so had to go to Bethlehem. The Messiah was going to come from the line of David and the prophet Micah had said that the promised ruler would be born in Bethlehem. And so, he was.

Isaiah had said that God was giving us a son, a child. He also prophesied that the messiah would be humble, a suffering servant.

So, Jesus arrives, not in a palace or even a comfortable house. He arrives in a stable and is placed in a manger – a feeding trough for animals.

Luke gives us very little details about the birth itself. He simply states that Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem because of the census– several days walk from Nazareth. He says that while there Mary gives birth to her first born, a son, wraps him in cloths and places him in a manger.

No wonder that after a long and bumpy ride Mary was ready to give birth when they arrived. It was a busy time with everyone needing to return to their own towns and they missed out on getting a room at the local guest houses.

In the previous chapter Luke had given greater details about how Mary was visited by Angel Gabriel who told her that she was favoured by God to bear his son, that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit and she was to name her son Jesus; meaning "God saves".

Immediately after the news of the birth, Luke shifts his attention to tell us about the delegation of Angels sent to announce the Saviour's birth.

Jesus, the son of the Most-High, had just been born in an out of the way corner of Bethlehem, in a stable or cave for animals to shelter in and now God sends an angel to proclaim the good news to lowly shepherds out in the field! Shepherds were often despised, dirty and rough around the edges.

*The shepherds were living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. They would not be expecting any visitors, especially not of the heavenly variety. So, no wonder they were terrified when an angel of the Lord appears, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.*

The angel knows of their terror and says...

*“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

To add weight to the import of this announcement and to the great joy it would bring... suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel praising God and saying,

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

This amazing visit from heaven to announce the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah... was to a few lowly shepherds in a field!

God chooses the outcast, the despised and marginalized, the humble to bestow his favour and his peace. Ceasar Augustus was known at the time for bringing Roman peace and prosperity, for being a saviour...but his was not peace for all as many suffered under his rule.

Jesus came as good news for **all** people.

The shepherds are captivated by the angels message; they believe the message and they rush off immediately to seek the baby lying in a manger. That was their sign, there may be other babies wrapped up in cloths, but not lying in a manger.

They find him, they worship him, and they spread the word. It seems they are full of joy as they return to their lowly job of watching the sheep, glorifying, and praising God. After Mary and Joseph, these shepherds were the first to see God in the flesh and they were transformed. We have no idea of the rest of their story, but it seems their earthly lowly existence didn't change, but in their hearts, they had peace, joy and hope after gazing on the amazing love of God in the face of Jesus.

This is the good news of Jesus, who came to live among us. The greatest gift that we receive is the joy and peace and love he bestows. God sent Jesus to save all people through his life, death, and resurrection.

*For God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.*

This is the good news that we need to hear and receive this Christmas. This is the message that all people throughout the world need to hear. Those living in darkness, those displaced and injured through war or disaster, those suffering with illness in body or mind or spirit, those grieving, those in despair, those who have no peace.

That is the good news message that we need to hear again and again.

I pray that you will hear the message of Christmas anew or maybe for the first time *tonight/today*. I pray that you will see the great light that has dawned. That you hear the good news of God sending his son Jesus to save us. To save us from hopelessness and despair. For in him we have great joy as he enters our hearts and fills us with the good gifts of love and peace. For...

When we are confused and afraid, Jesus is with us as our Wonderful Counselor.

When we worry about the situation in the world and despair at the Leaders and Governments, Jesus is the Mighty God who reigns forever with justice and compassion and righteousness and will one day return to put all things right.

When we feel isolated and alone, Jesus is our everlasting Father, his arms around us always, both now and for eternity.

When we feel anxious Jesus is our Prince of Peace.

His peace was announced at his birth and we read in John 14, that as he prepared to die Jesus tells his disciples that he would be sending them the Holy Spirit to live in them and he comforts them with these words...*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

World peace may not come until Jesus returns, but we can receive peace in our hearts and minds, and we can bring peace to others as we share the good news of Jesus.

Like the shepherds, may we rejoice in the angel's announcement of good news for all, glorifying and praising God. Our situations may not change, but because God sent Jesus, we have hope, we have peace, we have joy and the greatest of all – we have the love of God.

As you celebrate Christmas today may you rejoice in Jesus, Immanuel – God with us.  
Amen.