

Series Title: **'Simply Jesus'**
Message Title: **'Christmas 101'**
Scripture Source: **Luke 2:8-20; Matthew 1:21**
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Date: December 21, 2014

What is Christmas All About...to you?

If we sat down over a coffee, what would you say? If I asked you, 'what is the message of Christmas to you?' how would you answer? Let's talk about it for one minute, person to person!

In our media fuelled culture we would hear a wide range of answers: family time, shopping, gift giving, Santa, Christmas carols, good will to people, the birth of Jesus, a holiday, a scary Visa bill anticipated in January, and the list could go on. There is a lot of 'chatter' out there about Christmas and often we feel overwhelmed, confused, and weary by the time Christmas has come and gone.

So, let's pause for a short time this morning and reflect upon the Bible's 'take' on the message of Christmas. Maybe this Christmas Sunday can help you rethink what the season is truly about. Just maybe this service can help us un-clutter our minds and put this busy season in a healthier perspective.

Christmas 101: The Setting

Over the last few weeks we have looked at the message of Christmas through the wondering, doubting, fearful, longing, and ultimately trusting eyes of Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah. We have learned that their circumstances were riddled with uncertainty, pressure, whispers of scandal, and holy interventions from heaven, with messages of hope entrusted to them. And now, a startling message given to an unlikely group of men the night Jesus was born. Read Luke 2:8-20 (creatively, with images)

The setting for 'Christmas 101' is a mix of simplicity, beauty, wonder, and 'down to earth' realities.

Scene I: Luke 2:8 – Shepherds are tending to their flock. Ordinary guys engaged in a common yet important task. Generally speaking shepherds were not well regarded or respected. "Shepherds were despised people. They were suspected of not being very careful to distinguish between 'mine' and 'thine'; for this reason they were disbarred from giving evidence in court." (N. Geldenhuys) Not all shepherds were tainted with this reputation, some were men of integrity and spiritual passion. Probably these shepherds!

Scene II: Luke 2:9- Another 'sacred intervention' from heaven. Instantly a blaze of glory surrounds the men and permeates the setting. And fear puts an emotional 'chokehold' on them...they are stunned, startled, and terrified. Seriously, who wouldn't be?

Scene III: Luke 2: 10-12- A reassurance is given and the heart of the Christmas message is simply and clearly stated. 'Don't be afraid.' I have a message that will replace fear with peace and confusion with clarity.' How gracious God is, He understands the fears that well up and addresses them with a potent mix of grace and truth.

It is in this unexpected setting, with an unlikely group of men, that 'Christmas 101' is clearly and simply announced...for the original audience and for us today, and for future generations.

Christmas 101: The Message – Luke 2:10-12

The angel joyously states, 'This is a fantastic message that will result in great experiences of joy and hope to those who believe and act upon the announcement.' And here it is, 'Christmas 101'...

"Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

At the heart of the declaration the name 'Saviour' radiates a challenging and hope filled opportunity. This assertion strongly ties in with the name that was given to the baby.

Matthew 1:21 "She will give birth to a son, and you (Joseph) are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

The name 'Jesus' is the Greek form of the Hebrew name 'Joshua' which means 'The LORD saves'

Let's talk about the word 'sin.' It is not a popular word. For many people it speaks of condemnation, failure, and shame. It's a word we would rather do without...except it speaks of a reality that touches each and every one of us. You included.

The Bible teaches that each of us has been born with a sin nature...and it's one we act on consistently.

Let's pause...at RBC we believe that the Bible is God's communication to humanity. That the Bible offers insight on the human condition and God's provision of salvation. We believe God's word is unerring and authoritative truth that intersects profoundly with the human condition. With an offer of hope.

So, what is sin? Sin is the failure to love God supremely, love others sacrificially, and love ourselves wisely. God had marked out a path for us to follow. A relational path, with Him and others. A path to be marked by faith and obedience to God which would be manifested in a life of love. We exited that path. I did. You did. Sin is veering off God's path to set our own path. Does this have a 'ring of truth' to you?

Isaiah 53:6 "We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way."

Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

1 John 1:8 "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

And that fact of sin and being a sinner comes with a severe penalty. God must punish sin. He can't blow it off and pretend it isn't a big deal. It is...to a righteous and perfect God. "For the wages of sin is death..."

Romans 6:23.

This speaks of brokenness...a broken relationship with God, brokenness within, and brokenness with others. Death...spiritual and physical. Left to ourselves, we are in a hopeless situation. We can't 'save' ourselves.

But, Christmas 101 offers you and me profound hope. We have a Saviour. Jesus, the Promised Messiah has come, just as God said, throughout the ages and via the voice of prophets. "Christ the Lord."

Isaiah 9:6-7 read

Isaiah 53:3-6 God has graciously provided a Saviour for you and me, that we might be saved from the penalty and power of sin and saved to a restored relationship with Him...that can then enrich, energize, and enlighten every area of life. Your life included. Personal story

How Did Jesus Save Us...from the penalty of sin?

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly..."

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:6-8

Jesus, the promised Messiah lived a perfect life. He stepped in and took the punishment we deserved. He paid the death penalty for us...for you. God the Father raised him on the 3rd day, validating the adequacy of his sacrifice and his power over Satan, sin, and death. This is at the core of the Christian message, this is Christmas 101, a penalty paid, the Saviour has risen, and an offer of forgiveness and restoration is put before you.

Have you asked God to forgive you on the basis of what Jesus has done for you? Let me ask you, if you are not a follower of Jesus, does your philosophy of life, your religious beliefs, do they acknowledge the problem of sin and offer a provision? Does your 'faith' deal with the raw realities of life...or are you left to figure it all out on your own? Something to think deeply about...

How Does Jesus Save us from the power of sin?

Romans 8:10-11: The Spirit of the risen Jesus indwells us, enlightening and strengthening us to do God's will along the way, a way marked by love. It doesn't mean a perfect life, but progress is made along the way.

Do you yearn for power within to grow and mature, to say 'no' to the relentless onslaught of temptation? To say 'yes' increasingly to the way of love and righteousness? Christmas 101 offers the hope of a power to live in healthier ways.

How Do we Experience Salvation? Essential Responses Today

We can learn from the angels and shepherds: Luke 2:13-20

The angel and heavenly host understand who God is and who his provision of salvation is and they celebrate and glorify God. The shepherds respond with understanding, personal faith, and a desire to share Christmas 101 with others.

What about you and me?...experiencing God's salvation from the penalty and power of sin requires UNDERSTANDING the fact of sin and brokenness. Acknowledging that we have a problem beyond our ability to fix or solve. Admitting that we need a Saviour, and his name is Jesus, the promised Messiah. If you have questions, we would love to hear your story and converse with you.

To experience God's salvation we must personally place our TRUST and hope in Jesus. John 3:16 And we then choose to FOLLOW Jesus day by day, energized and enlightened by his Spirit...and as we do we experience why Jesus came, to be Saviour and Lord.

Many of us claim to be Christians, do our lives give tangible evidence that Jesus is indeed a powerful Saviour? Do our lives overflow with the hope of Christmas 101, so that others might come to understand...believe and follow Jesus?