

Christmas Sermon – 2008 – Isaiah 42 Luke 2, John 19, Revelation 21

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One year, a husband decided to buy his mother-in-law a very different Christmas gift – the gift was a cemetery plot. The next year, he didn't buy her a gift at all. So his mother in law asks him – “Why didn't you buy me a gift this year?” And he says, “Well, you still haven't used the gift I bought you last year!”

III – One of the most memorable presents I ever got for Christmas was when I was about 6 years old – **(PPT – photo)** – I think that's a photo of that year. The present was a Spiderman web shooter! It was very cool – it strapped on to your wrist and it shot out a web with a suction cup on the end. I played with it for hours! And then I don't think I ever saw it again!

After Christmas, a similar thing happens every year. I spend so much time planning for Christmas, it's so busy – shopping, trees, presents, decorations, Christmas cards... then we celebrate Christmas Day, then it's all over! It sort of... disappears!

There's a whole lot of planning, then a big celebration, but then what?

So that's my question today:

We plan Christmas.

We celebrate Christmas.

But then what?

And the four readings we had today help us to think about that. The planning. The celebration. But then what...

Planning

Our first reading takes us back to the Old Testament, and we can see that for thousands of years, God was planning Christmas. Isaiah was one of God's prophets who was around 700 years before Jesus and he tells us about God's plans for sending Jesus as our saviour:

PPT – Isa 42:1, 7:14, 11:1, Micah 5:2

Isaiah 42:1 tells us the saviour will bring justice to the nations.

Isaiah 7:14 tells us he will be born from a virgin.

Isaiah 11:1 says he will be born from the family of King David.

Another prophet, Micah, (5:2) tells us he will come from Bethlehem.

God was planning for Christmas for a very long time. But why? Why was it so important to plan this event?

PPT – If you can turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 1:21, on page 955 – follow this verse with me at the bottom of the page: “*She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*”

Just put your finger on those last two words there. What was so important that God spent so much time planning Christmas? What was so important that Jesus had to come? What did Jesus come to save us **from**? Interest rates? Petrol prices? War? Hunger? Global warming? Terrorism? Why was he called Jesus? What did he come to save us from? To save his people from **their sins**. The name Jesus means “The Lord Saves”.

I hear a lot of people saying “Christmas is about sharing and family time together and holidays and giving.” But there’s really only one word that sums up Christmas. Christmas is about **salvation**! And that’s why it’s a celebration. Christmas is about **God saving us**. And to understand what that really means, and the importance of it, we need to look beyond just the story of Christmas.

III – Quick question: Did anyone buy Christmas crackers this year? I always buy the cheapest ones possible, (**Crack one open**) Do you know research has shown that you get the same jokes in the cheap crackers as the expensive ones – and they’re all bad! Like the one we got the other day: “Why are Pirates called Pirates? Because they Aarrghhh!”

But all Christmas crackers are essentially all the same. They look **nice** on the outside. They’re decorations. And then you pull both ends. And when they’re broken open, you see the gift inside. A hat, a bad joke and a plastic toy.

PPT – picture of Jesus in manger

Jesus, the baby in the manger, is a nice image at Christmas. Almost a decoration like a cracker. He’s an image many people associate with peace and love and joy and hope. Because he’s a baby. But the peace, love, joy and hope have nothing to do with him being a baby. Like the cracker, it’s not until Jesus is broken open that we see the true gift. But it’s not something cheap and plastic.

The baby Jesus grows up and at Easter we celebrate his death on the cross. On the cross, Jesus’ body is broken and his blood is shed for us. That’s a difficult image to think about at Christmas. But the name Jesus means “The Lord Saves” and the way the Lord saves is by the baby Jesus growing up and dying on a cross. It is the **blood** of Jesus that is the real gift. He saved us from our sin NOT by being a cute baby. But by dying on the cross.

- The plan of God at Christmas was to send Jesus to save us.
- The celebration of Christmas is about the baby Jesus growing up and dying to save us by taking the punishment we deserved on the cross, then rising from the dead.
- But then what? What’s next?

III – Tomorrow I think a lot of us might ask that question. What now? Sleep in. Eat leftovers. Play with our new toys. Clean up by stuffing the bins full of wrapping paper. Holidays. Boxing day cricket. Post Christmas sales.

But what’s next in God’s plans? What happens after Jesus comes as a baby, grows up, dies on a cross and rises from the dead?

The second coming

Revelation 21 has our answer – Jesus comes back. And he brings with him a new world, with no more death, mourning, crying, pain or tears. This is what’s next in God’s plans. This is what we’re waiting for. This world is a difficult place. Sin is **always** a problem in this world. And because of sin, death is always there. And so is pain. And sickness. And war. And hate. And parking at Westfields. The evil never ends!

And the first time Jesus came to this world, he came to deal with sin – to be a sacrifice. To do the work of salvation. To pay our debt of sin. To offer us salvation. The first time Jesus came, he threw out the life preserver and told us to hang on.

But the second time he comes, he comes to collect us and bring us to that place where there is no more sin, or death, or pain or tears. That is a day worth waiting for. But it’s also a day we need to be ready for. We need to be hanging on to that life preserver every day while we wait for him.

Are you hanging on to him? Is Jesus the Lord of your life every day? Are you depending on him?

Today, we can have a great time celebrating Christmas day. And we can come back in a few months to celebrate Easter and be thankful that Jesus grew up to die on a cross to take the punishment for our sin... but we always need to be reminded of what's next. Jesus is coming again. What are we doing about that? Are we ready? Are we hanging on to him?

III – This year, 67,931 students sat the HSC in NSW. And they received their results just a week or so ago. I remember that day for me 19 years ago. I remember spending all that time preparing. Studying...sort of? Then sitting the exams. Then finally getting the results. When I was waiting for the results, all I was thinking was "What did I get?!" But once I got the result, all I was thinking was "What now??!" I spent years preparing (or at least weeks!) and then it was all over. We had a little celebration then... then I had to decide what to do next. After all the preparation and the celebration, you have to choose a direction for your life. You have to choose a path to commit to. TAFE, uni, work, holiday – you have to work out what direction you're going to go.

After Christmas, the next big thing for us to celebrate is Jesus' **second** coming. What direction are we going in? What path are we committed to? Who are we following and what are we holding on to?

Every year we spend so much time preparing for Christmas. We spend so much time celebrating the **first** coming of Jesus. But are we ready for the **second** coming of Jesus?

Let's pray.