

# God's hope and peace coming into a dark world

Christmas Eve 2024

## BIBLE READING

Luke 2:1-20

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. Everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph 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. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 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.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, '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.'

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.'

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.'

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

## MESSAGE God's hope and peace coming into a dark world

I'm sure that we all are quite familiar with the Christmas story, and would be quite confident that we know the story inside out.

Let's try a quick quiz to see how well we really know the story ...!

1. When Mary was told she was going to have a baby, were she and Joseph

- a) Just good friends?
- b) Engaged to be married?**
- c) Recently married?

2. How did Mary get to Bethlehem?

- a) She walked
- b) She rode a donkey
- c) She caught an Uber
- d) We don't know**

3. When was Jesus most likely born?

- a) Late December
- b) Mid April
- c) Mid September
- d) We don't know**

4. When did baby Jesus cry (choose one or more)?

- a) When he was hungry**
- b) When he needed his nappy changed**
- c) When he saw the presents that the wise men brought
- d) He didn't cry at all

5. What song did the angels sing?

- a) Joy to the world
- b) Hark! The herald angels sing
- c) O come all ye faithful
- d) El Hakkavood illiy Shamaim**

6. Where was Jesus born?

- a) In a stable
- b) In a house
- c) In an inn
- d) We don't know**

7. Which animals were there when baby Jesus was born (choose one or more)?

- a) A donkey

- b) Cows
- c) Sheep
- d) Camels
- e) **None of the above**

8. How many wise men were there?

- a) Two
- b) Three
- c) Four
- d) **We don't know**

9. Who were the wise men? What was their job?

- a) They were kings from the East
- b) They were magicians
- c) **They were astrologers**
- d) We don't know

10. When the wise men brought their gifts, where did they find Jesus?

- a) **In a house**
- b) In a stable
- c) In a manger
- d) We don't know

Now that we've got the story straight, I want to spend a few minutes reflecting on the year that we've had in 2024.

At first I couldn't help but think about all the **bad stuff** that has filled our TV screens and news feeds this year, including ...

- 2024 will be the **hottest year** ever recorded ...  
heatwaves, floods, fires ...
- **Wars**, violence and suffering (Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, Yemen, Myanmar)
- **Inflation** and rising cost of everything including large hikes in rental cost.  
Many young people are pessimistic that they will ever own a house
- Harmful effect of **social media** on the mental health of young people such that the government plans to ban



under 16s from social media

- Levels of **violence directed against women** in this country

I'm sure that you could add to this rather depressing list. There is much that is dark and bleak going on in the world and in our country.

But are there also some **good news stories**?

Yes! there are **plenty** of good news stories if we go looking for them ... many of them are local and close to home including ...

- The Croydon **station redevelopment** is nearly complete.
- Early in the New Year we will be installing **solar panels** on the roof of this building to reduce our emissions and save on electricity bills
- The Croydon congregation has been granted ongoing access to the **building at Croydon North** so that the meals program and arts program can continue
- Pacific Island nations have been allowed to present their **climate change case at the International Court of Justice in The Hague** against rich polluting nations ... like Australia
- Several people in our community have successfully got through **major surgeries** and **health scares** this year which is also a blessing
- Many people have been living faithful Christian lives – caring for others, feeding the hungry, visiting the lonely, offering hospitality, sharing the good news of Jesus.



Hopefully you have other stories that you could add to this list.

I invite you now to spend a minute of two reflecting on your own personal journey in 2024 and what has been a **blessing** to you or where **you** have been a **blessing** to **others**.

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How does the remembering the birth of baby Jesus born to a young peasant girl nearly 2000 years ago affect **our lives** as we reflect on the year that's been and look forward to what lies ahead next year?

While we sometimes despair at the state of the world and the great **violence** and **injustice** that seems to go on unchecked, that is the reason why God sent Jesus to bring much needed **light** and **hope** into the world and into our



lives.

As the Gospel of John puts it, the world was **full of darkness** and Jesus came to bring **life and light** to all people.

As the angel explained to the frightened shepherds, the birth of Jesus is **good news** of **great joy** for all people, just not what they were expecting.



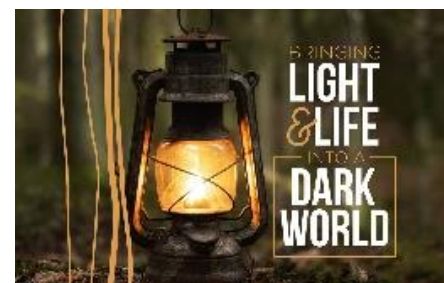
Jesus will not rule from a palace or live a privileged life, but rather will grow up **incognito** and mostly hang around with **those on the margins of society**. He will bring hope to them through healing their sicknesses, restoring them to community and feeding them both physical and spiritual food. He will challenge the conventional thinking of his day and turn the world upside down.

The fact that the news of Jesus' birth was shared first with lowly shepherds is a good pointer to what lay ahead. Pretty soon his family would become refugees, fleeing from the murderous King Herod.



Although Jesus grew up in a small peasant village at the edge of the world's ruling empire ... he would change the world.

My prayer this Christmas is that Jesus will continue to bring his light and life into the dark places in our world that so desperately need hope and peace and love.



**How will this happen?** Through people like us who walk in the footsteps of Jesus to bring life and hope to our neighbours, both those close by and those far away.

We're going to sing another carol, O little town of Bethlehem, but with some new verses that reflect the state of our world and the hope that Jesus brings.

CAROL TIS 316 O little town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem,

how still we see thee lie!

Above your deep and dreamless sleep

the silent stars go by;

yet, in your dark streets shining

the everlasting light,

the hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in you tonight.

O sad and troubled Bethlehem,  
we hear your longing cry  
for peace and justice to be born  
and cruel oppression die.  
How deep your need for that great gift  
of love in human form.  
Let Christ in you be seen again  
and hearts by hope made warm.

While morning stars and evening stars  
shine out in your dark sky,  
despair now stalks your troubled streets  
where innocents still die.  
And Jesus, born of Mary,  
whose love will never cease,  
feels even now your pain and fear,  
longs with you for your peace.

Amazingly and lovingly  
Jesus the child has come  
and, brought to birth through human pain,  
makes broken hearts his home.  
He comes to comfort all who weep,  
to challenge every wrong  
and, living with the weak and poor,  
becomes their hope, their song.

Verse 1 Phillips Brooks 1835–93 *alt.* Verses 2–4 Wendy Ross–Barker