

## 2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

### The forgotten Christmas

Christmas Day message presented by John Edmondstone

*“For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.”*

(John Chapter 18 verse 37)

In our current climate of fear and trouble, the months leading up to Christmas have been difficult for many people. Christmas was almost lost this year, because of the worry about economic problems, but now it is here, at last. As Christians, we need to be concerned about what is most important at Christmas – to adore the infant Christ. It is a home time for us, as it is for others, but the real focus is the story of that miraculous birth. Some however, have forgotten the meaning of Christmas. A poem I read some time ago is simply called “Lost Christmas”

*Somewhere, buried under tissue,  
Bent beneath the load of our hurried, harried giving,  
Christmas lost the road.  
Christmas, that was sweet and simple, with a song, a star –  
Christmas, that was hushed and holy, seems so very far.  
Let us stop and look for Christmas; maybe if we tried  
We could find it somewhere under all the gifts we tied.  
Christmas, waiting, wistful, weary, maybe very near –  
Christmas lost, a little lonely, wishing to be here.*

When we begin to try to understand the meaning of Christmas we shall find the meaning in the words of Jesus Himself. Here is His version of the reason for His birth. “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.” These are the words that Jesus gave to a puzzled Pontius Pilate. He is being questioned by Pilate. Pilate said, “So you are a King?” Jesus could not deny it. He replied, “You say that I am.” And then He gave the reason for His coming into the world. “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.” From this affirmation of our Lord about Himself, we learn four essentials of Christmas.

#### 1. Christ’s birth was unique.

It was unlike any other. It was a miracle. That is where Christmas worship must begin – with the recognition that it was a miracle. It is not one among many. It is without parallel, it is unique.

The Eternal Son of God became a man and entered into the world to show men the way back to God. He was born of the Virgin Mary. He was born to be the King and it was His Kingship that he stressed before Pilate. You may remember an old hymn called, “Ivory Palaces”. This is how a verse goes: “Out of the ivory palaces into a world of woe, only His great eternal love made my Saviour go.” That is the first essential of Christmas we learn from Christ Himself, His birth was unique.

## **2. Secondly, there was a purpose in Christ's unique birth.**

It was no haphazard event. It occurred in accordance with God's eternal purpose. There is a plan for the ages. The coming of our Lord was at a precise time, in a precise place, for the Scriptures tell us, "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son." So we can understand what He meant when He said, "For this I was born and for this I have come into the world". There was an end in view, there was a purpose for the unique birth of Christ. Our Lord had a mission to fulfill and it would culminate in His going to the cross; all that happened was in the will and purpose and the plan of God.

At Christmas time, then, we ought to pause and dwell on the purposes of God. There are moments in this age of ours when we are almost tempted to question the wisdom of God. So many things happening so rapidly in our society. So many awful possibilities loom up for us, that we sometimes lose our hold on Him and give way to doubt and fear. The Christmas Gospel should re-assure us: God is working His purposes out. He came down to earth from Heaven. Let us rejoice that there was a purpose in Christ's unique birth.

## **3. Thirdly, here is the essential of Christmas as we listen to what the Lord Himself has to tell us about it.**

That purpose was to bear witness. "For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness." The function of our Lord is here expressed in one word. He was sent to be a witness. John the Baptist was a witness to Him. He said, "I am not the light, but I was sent to bear witness to the light." But Christ is also a witness. He points beyond Himself to God the Father. He fulfills the prophecies of old that when the Messiah should come He would bare witness to the Father. Isaiah the prophet declared, "Behold I have made Him a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people."

A witness is one who knows because he has seen and tells others. He supplies the evidence of fact. In a court of law the eye witness tells what actually took place in His presence. Other men may repeat what they have heard. But this cannot be compared with first hand information brought by one who was actually there. His witness is true because He came from God. He is the very Son of God; the integrity of His testimony cannot be doubted.

Christ reveals in human personality and in human actions and reactions what God is like. His whole career is a mirror of the infinite God. As we see Him going about doing good, healing the sick, caring for the outcast, giving life to the oppressed, seeking the lost, saving the sinner, we see what God Himself is like. That is the deep meaning of Christmas, and we should ponder it afresh this season.

In the Greek of the New Testament the word for witness is 'martyr'. The grim experience of Christians in the Roman Empire many years ago meant that to be a witness often cost people their lives. When we are thinking about Jesus we cannot separate His birth from His death so that even over the cradle there hung the shadow of Calvary. They belong together, because He was born to die. He could only save mankind by dying for them. He could only die by first being born. This too, we should think about at Christmas. It may disturb us, but it brings us to the lost Christmas.

*I see Him in the manger lie,  
a babe, yet Lord of earth and sky,  
the loving Jesus – born to die,  
and look on Him.*

**4. Now we come to the fourth and last essential of Christmas according to Jesus Himself and that is, that His witness was to the truth.**

It was not truth in general, Christ testified not simply to truth but to the truth. It was specific truth to which He witnessed. It was the truth of God, Saving truth, ultimate truth. We might even say that He came to testify to reality, for it is the central truth of redemption that explains every other sort of truth. Once a man has laid hold on this he has the key to all truth.

The way in which our Lord bore witness to the truth about God, was to embody it. He was truth incarnate. He was truth in a human life. He was truth walking the ways of men. Christ did not simply speak the truth. He was the truth. Truth, through and through. Truth is not a thing of words but of life and being. "I am the truth," claimed Jesus. It was this that cost Him His life. Once an American President, Abraham Lincoln, against the advice of his friends, decided to make the speech which lost him a seat in the American Senate in 1858. He refused to compromise with the truth as he saw it. "If it is decreed that I go down because of this speech, then let me go down linked to the truth". The Lord Jesus Christ went down linked to the truth. It was as a witness, a martyr, to the truth that He died on the cross. Thank God that was not the end, He proved to be more than a martyr. He rose triumphant from the tomb to vindicate God's truth forever. We must never forget the ransom price He paid. This too, should be in our thoughts at Christmas time.

It was this reference to the truth that broke Pilate's short lived patience. "What is truth?" he asked. Not jestingly, but with a shrug of the shoulders which suggested that he was far too busy to embark on a discussion. In doing this, Pilate was turning away from the truth. Jesus gave him his opportunity when He said, "Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." But Pilate refused to listen. Christ was born to save and would have saved Him, but he would not listen. The hour of grace struck, but he spurned it.

Is that to happen again this Christmas time as each one of us is confronted, as Pilate was, by God's truth in Jesus? Shall we hear His voice, even from the manger? Shall we yield Him our hearts, love and adoration? Shall we accept His witness to the truth? His new life is available to us. What a difference that will make to life ahead of us. If we find the lost Christmas we have found the lost Christ and more importantly, He has found us, you and me.

*A Blind Child's Christmas Carol*

*One day I shall behold the rose  
That blooms beyond the sky  
And the eternal lily, whose  
Perfection cannot die.  
I shall behold the Lamb of Love  
And in the living Tree  
The burning plumage of the Dove,  
The Holy Spirit, see.*

*I shall behold in Paradise  
After my second birth,  
The loveliest and most loving eyes  
That ever dawned on earth.  
I shall be like those kings of old  
Who journeyed through the night  
With myrrh and frankincense and gold  
To where the Star was bright.*

*To where the new-born Face Divine  
Dawned like the day on them  
Who sought by faith their Light and mine  
In far-off Bethlehem.*

*Ruth Pitter*