

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Christmas Day 2010

Presented by Archbishop Peter Jensen

I have a marvellous photo of a friend who has just received some really good news, some life-changing, life enhancing news. His face is transformed: he almost looks drunk with excitement; he has been overtaken by a joy spontaneous, and uncontrolled. He has experienced a hope fulfilled and a future assured; he has seen an evil overcome.

His face is transformed.

Has this ever happened to you?

Did you ever receive some really good news?

Christianity is such news. Some people think that Christianity is merely an intellectual and/or moral system. At one level, so it is. But in essence, at its heart, it is an announcement, an event, a happening. It is glad tidings which produces great joy.

Listen to what the angel said the shepherds: 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.'

For all the people, said the angel, so not merely individual. First for the Jewish people; but the outpouring is for all people in the whole world. The glad tidings of Christmas belong to everyone. It is not merely private good news; this is public good news.

And yet it also comes to you as an individual and so is your personal good news as well. It may be that you are in fact on your own today. It may be that for you Christmas brings sad memories of people who are not with you, of opportunities lost, of lack of love and care.

But, even so, I have good news, glad tidings for you today! You are not alone; you are not forgotten; the Son of God himself has joined us and will never leave us, not one though you are the least of his brothers or sisters.

The only parallel for such joy I can think of, is the end of a great war, in which people take to the streets to cheer, feast, dance and revel. The proof of what I say is Christmas itself, the greatest feast day in the whole world. Something even greater than the end of the war has created a well nigh universal feast day, a day of celebration and joy.

In this case even greater joy, and all over the birth of a child. A new baby usually brings a life-changing celebration, but mainly for family. In this case it brings joy to the world.

Who is this child?

Christ: born in David's city; the long promised king.

Saviour: the one who releases from enemies; military and political? – no, greater than that. Enemies worthy of God himself, the enemies of sin, guilt, evil and death.

Lord: the ruler who brings peace to the world, who brings order out of chaos, who leads his people in their daily lives, shaping their aspirations, filling their hopes, looking after their interests.

Indeed the most famous one who has ever lived; worshiped by millions as Lord and Saviour. God's great word over history – it is heading in his direction. It will end well. This great news, life changing news we have been talking about this morning.

Do we need it?

We live in a broken and divided world. We solve many of our lesser problems, but not the problems of sin and death. One of the greatest evils in a world of evils is bad leadership. It is corrupt and venal leadership which ensures that human need remains untended while the leadership enriches itself.

Recent polling has shown that Australians are religious but still searching. That is, we are still asking the 'why' question, the question to do with purpose in life. Why am I here? We are searching for an answer. This search is to be commended.

But many of the answers are superstitious, such as astrology. Superstition can never satisfy the longings of the human heart and they cannot mend our brokenness. We have broken relationships, broken hearts, broken bodies. At the centre of our being we need the perfect relationship with the living God who has made us and when we cut him out of our lives we continue to be restless and lack peace. We need peace with God.

Many other people are asking the truth question. I take it that the numbers turning up claiming to be unbelievers or atheists are insisting that they want to live according to the truth. Superstition will not satisfy them because it is not based on the truth. Again, those who seek for truth and insist on the highest standards of truth are to be commended.

I want to say to both groups that there is an answer to their questions and end point to their search. I want to say that good news has entered the world with the birth of Jesus Christ, and that he is the truth. He is the leader, the Saviour from our real problems and the true leader of our lives. I want to invite them to search here both for purpose and for authenticity. Is God far away from you? Look here to Jesus Christ where God has drawn near to you and to us all.

Let me be personal. What is broken in your life and what now can be done about it? A sort of spiritual melancholy can set in where we spend days and waste years. What have we got to show for it all?

The Bible diagnoses our problems as sin, guilt and death. We are better than our fate. We have not been designed to finish on some scrap heap amongst the garbage of history. We are designed for eternal life and great joy.

The baby looks small and insignificant and his birth was extremely humble. But he is in truth, Christ, Saviour and Lord!

On him rest the hopes of this world. God is creating a future for us all. He has not abandoned us. He has drawn near to us by becoming one of us, even to the extent of becoming a child. This is utterly God-like.

He aims to deal with our sin, guilt and death through this One. He is forgiving, renewing, transforming, hope-filling us through Jesus. He is taking up our brokenness and mending us. Our situation does not have to be hopeless – it can be hopeful. There is joy in the world.

Some of us have made scepticism and cynicism a life-style. We question everything for fear that we may have to commit to something. We are like sulky children to who go to a party but sit in the corner refusing to take part. World- weary; distrustful; proud even to our own hurt. We prefer to huddle in the rags of cynicism than to don the gown of joy.

This morning, look, look at Jesus. This is not merely another social or political fix. This goes deep to the heart of human need and fear. This deals with the real problems. This is God himself intervening to save and to lead. Him break down whatever barriers you have erected to keep him out and just as he entered the world, let him enter your heart. Let God's good news become your good news and be filled with joy!

Dear God,

I know that I am not worthy to be accepted by you. I don't deserve the gift of eternal life. I am guilty of rebelling against you and ignoring you. I need forgiveness.

Thank you for sending Jesus to die for me that I may be forgiven. Thank you that he rose from the dead to give me new life.

Please forgive me and change me, that I may live with Jesus as my ruler. Amen.

What will you do with this good news? Well, if you accept it – if you prayed that prayer with me – you have cause for real joy this morning. Celebrate it with Christian friends. Join them regularly and learn more about living the good news in your life and your unfolding relationship with Jesus.

But you may still be wondering whether it is good news. Do this for me. Find a Christian and start talking to them about why it is such good news. If it makes no impact on anyone, you could pass it off. But that child born two thousand years ago still speaks to lives today. He will speak to yours. In the words of the carol, 'O little town of Bethlehem' – "Where meek souls will receive him still – the dear Christ enters in".