

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Christmas in July

Presented by Stuart Robinson

Good morning! Well we've had a run of frosty mornings and some chilly evenings - so in keeping with some of the city restaurants, taverns, clubs and churches, I'd like to run with the *Christmas in July* theme, if I may.

Three simple words, uttered by a terrifyingly imposing angel to a small group of shepherds brilliantly summarise the purpose of Christmas and the substance of Christianity:

"Do not be afraid" says the angel, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord" (Luke 2:10 – 11).

'Saviour'

'Christ'

'Lord'

Let's take a few moments to reflect on those three words.

Music Break

Our first word is: 'Saviour'. In November 2002 Valerie and Isabel von Jordan, German nationals, arrived in Kakadu National Park. They'd been in Bali and had narrowly escaped injury during the bombing of the *Sari* night club. So they came to Australia – to the 'Top End' – for rest and a change of scenery.

With a group of international visitors the von Jordans signed up for a tour of the park. One of the sights they visited was 'Sandy Bottom' billabong. Though the waterhole has signs posted in many languages warning visitors of the dangers – namely very large crocodiles, the von Jordans, a guide, and other tourists went swimming at dusk.

They disregarded the warnings and in so doing exhibited a high level of contempt toward the park authorities who placed them there. And tragedy struck.

Isabel von Jordan was heard to scream immediately before she vanished beneath the murky waters. Her body was retrieved the next day – she'd been taken by a four metre crocodile. Though the authorities warned people of the very real dangers associated with swimming in the creek, the tourists decided to take their chances. What Miss von Jordan needed above all else (in that sickening moment), was a rescuer, a saviour. That was her greatest need. But no one was on hand to protect her from such an appalling death.

That true story illustrates (albeit inadequately) something of *our* greatest need. The Bible helps us see that when we turn our backs on God – and disregard his decrees, his commands, and his loving rule, we are exposing ourselves to a great danger. That danger – put simply, is ending our time on this earth estranged from God and as such, falling headlong into a hellish eternity of alienation, regret and hopelessness. What we need is a rescuer, a saviour. Someone who can haul us back from the brink; someone who can save us from the consequences of our choices – our sin.

The “Good News” about which the angel speaks is this: There is a Saviour. There is rescuer. God has taken action and provided us with a way of escape. Not a philosophy, or set of religious observances, but a person. And his name is Jesus.

The second thing we need to note (as we work through our *Christmas in July* theme) is that this rescuer, this Jesus, is also the ‘Christ’.

Music Break

Well our second word on this *Christmas in July* Sunday is ‘Christ’. The Greek word ‘Christ’ is roughly the equivalent of the Hebrew term, ‘Messiah’. Jesus, the ‘saviour’ is also the Christ, the Messiah.

One of the themes in the *Lord of the Rings* is the need or the search for a powerful deliverer – a king who will rescue his people from oppression and tyranny. Now, that is also a Biblical theme (which predates – though, interestingly, informs Tolkien’s writings).

The Bible anticipates a day when God’s Heavenly king, the Messiah (the ‘anointed’ One – Daniel 9:25) will rule over his people for all time. Here is how that is accomplished in Jesus.

Jesus has been described as the ‘servant-king’. For you see Jesus, though thoroughly immersed in our world, is not corrupted by it. It is this sinless Jesus, this God in Christ, who rescues us from the consequences of our selfishness and godlessness by standing in our stead.

The infant in the cradle grows into a man who gives his life on a cross. The separation from God which my sin ‘earns’ is embraced fully by Jesus on my behalf. I am shielded or rescued from that which is my due; an eternity of alienation and hopelessness. That is how the king serves us.

Like Paula Chican, who tightly wrapped her body around her 4-year-old daughter Cecilia as their plane crashed just after take-off from LA some years ago (and in so doing protected Cecilia from the impact and the flames [though she herself died]), Jesus shields and protects all who take him seriously from the consequences of sin.

Then, in a spectacular display of power and triumph, Jesus rises from death and publicly ascends into heaven – where he is seated as ruler and King. Which is why he is also spoken of (by the angel) as being the ‘Lord’.

Music Break

Our third word, as we continue with our *Christmas in July* theme is, ‘Lord’. One of the least popular aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry is his Lordship. That is, his demand for our allegiance, that we follow him and take him seriously. Let me take a moment to illustrate what I mean.

A young police-officer, whose name is Isaac, was on duty outside the Pentagon when the infamous September 11 terrorist attack took place. Isaac ran into the inky blackness and called out in the hope that survivors would hear his voice and follow him to safety. And that is exactly what Wayne Sinclair and five of his friends did. They were lost and confused and had all but given up – and then they heard Isaac calling to them.

They followed his voice – and he led them to safety. Had they ignored his call to follow they would have perished. That is true for people in this world. If we ignore Jesus’ call we will perish. He invites us to follow him – to live under his loving rule, now and for eternity.

To live apart from him, to ignore him, to dismiss his death and resurrection on our behalf, is to consign ourselves to a forever of emptiness, and darkness, and regret.

So Jesus is the Saviour, the Christ, and the Lord.

Now don't forget, as we continue our *Christmas in July* theme, how the shepherds respond to the information that they've received from the throne room of heaven: Firstly, they take it seriously. We read in Luke's gospel, "they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby, who was lying in the manger" v.16.

Secondly, they spread the word: St. Luke writes, "When they had seen him (the baby Jesus), they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds had told them" vv. 17-18.

I put it to you that you can do no better than follow their example – take the "good news of great joy for all the people" seriously, and enthusiastically share it with all who will listen.

Christmas in July - a "made-up festival" that affords us the opportunity to consider again the *very real* and relevant message of the angel, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord." Luke 2:10 – 11.

Can I urge you on this mid-winter's morning to listen, hear and respond to the voice of God in the message of his heavenly servant:

'Saviour' 'Christ' 'Lord'

For those who have heard and really do wish to do business with God, one of the very best ways to take action is to speak to him; to pray.

I've written the sort of prayer that you might find helpful. Let me read it to you after the break.

Music Break

Let me close with prayer. You can make this prayer your own, by simply repeating the words in your heart – to God. He will hear and answer your prayer.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus as Saviour, Christ and Lord.

Like those shepherds, please give me grace to take this very good news seriously and then joyfully and enthusiastically share it with all who will listen.

I place my life in your hands. Help me to live for you.

Thank you for hearing and answering this prayer.

Amen.