

**Armagh Baptist Church – Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2009**  
**Carol Service Epilogue**

**Introduction**

Tonight we've had different parts of the Bible read to us. We've heard from Isaiah prophesying Jesus' birth in the Old Testament, and we've also heard from Matthew & Luke and their accounts of Jesus' birth in the New Testament. But one Gospel writer that we haven't heard from is John.

John's slant on Christmas is slightly different from the other Gospel writers. John tells us in his first chapter that **this baby** we celebrate at Christmas time, came from heaven into this world! He didn't just begin in Bethlehem's manger, or in Mary's womb, He always existed in heaven in eternity past!  
In fact this baby was there at the very Creation of the World!  
He goes even further – this baby actually Created the World!

Look at John 1:3 & 10. The 'Word' that John talks about is Jesus (v.14). He says in v.3: *'Through Him all things were made - without him nothing was made that has been made!'* This baby made all that you see around you!

In v.10 he says, *'He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him!'* He made the world, but the sad thing is that when he eventually came into the world that he had made, the people of this world didn't even recognize him, never mind accept Him as their Creator!

But in Colossians 1:16 it says:

*'For by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.'*

In other words, he created absolutely everything, and that includes you! You were created *by him*, and what's more you were created *for him*!

This baby created the World – He created you and me!  
But we don't tend to think about that at Christmas time, do we?  
We like to think of a little baby, wrapped up in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And that's right, that's the image of that first Christmas.  
But nobody is intimidated by that – a helpless little baby lying in a cradle!

But even in the traditional Christmas story we were supposed to see more!  
My message tonight is called: **'Preparing for Christmas'** or 'Getting ready for Christmas'. Somebody asked me that on Friday – 'Are you all ready for Christmas?' And I had to say, 'Honestly – no I'm not!' Let me ask you tonight, Are you ready for Christmas? Are you prepared for Christmas? I'm not just talking about all the preparations in terms of shopping, and getting the food ready and writing cards and wrapping presents, etc, etc...

I mean are you *really* ready for Christmas? What *preparation* have you made?

The main characters in the Christmas Story were all ready for Christmas. God had prepared each one of them:

**1. Mary was prepared by God for that first Christmas (Luke 1:26-38)**

It came as quite a shock to her system, I'm sure!  
She wasn't even married. She'd never known a man. She was a virgin. But God chose her to bring his eternal Son into this world as a human baby. The angel Gabriel was sent to prepare her for all that was going to happen. In vs.30-33 she was prepared for the fact that she was going to give birth to a baby who was in fact the very Son of God!  
In vs.35-37 she was told how this would happen: She would conceive miraculously, by the power of the Holy Spirit, *'for nothing is impossible with God!'* So by v.38 Mary has come to the point where she is now ready for God's Will to be done. God prepared Mary for that first Christmas. But...

**2. What about poor Joseph? (Matt 1:18-25) – He had to be prepared too!**

Joseph was engaged to be married to this girl, Mary. He then hears through the grapevine that she's pregnant! How do you think he would feel..? Right – He would have thought the worst – and he was already making plans to call the whole thing off – to literally 'divorce' Mary – because that's what it took! But Joseph was a good man (v.19). He wasn't just thinking about himself, he was thinking about Mary and her reputation.  
But an angel had to come and prepare him for all that was going to happen too. In the explanation he was given, he was told that this baby was conceived miraculously by the Holy Spirit – no other man had been involved. More than that, he was told that this baby would be called 'JESUS' – why? Because he would not only be 'the Son of God' he would be 'the Saviour of the World' – for all who would believe in Him for themselves. He would also be called 'Immanuel' – for God had come to be with us!  
This baby would be none other than God himself, come down from heaven, in the form of a baby. This was the Creator, taking upon himself the form of one of his creation – a baby. This was the Word becoming flesh! (John 1:14).

But I'm sure most people looking into that manger, in that dirty old stable in Bethlehem, found it hard to believe that this was anything more than a baby who had chosen to come at the wrong time for his poor parents! Think of it: Far from home and comforts, with nowhere to lay him except among the animals in a stable – in a feeding trough!

But there were some who saw past that façade to see what really lay behind that Nativity Scene...

### **3. The Shepherds (Luke 2:8-20)**

It actually took a whole multitude of angels to convince these shepherds and *to prepare them* for what they were going to see in that stable! But they believed it. They saw beyond that Nativity Scene, to see that this was the Messiah that God had promised for such a long time. That this baby was indeed the Saviour of the World – born to them that day in the City of David!

To the outward eye there was probably nothing special about what they saw, but to the eye of faith, choosing to believe what God had told them, they saw the Lord! They saw 'the Good Shepherd' lying on a bed of straw!

### **4. The Wise Men (Matthew 2:1-12)**

It might have been some time after the birth by the time these Kings from the Far East got to see Jesus, but God had prepared them for it too!

They were astronomers – star gazers – so God used a bright new star to get their attention. They saw in that special star something very significant:

- This star heralded the birth of a King, and it led them right to Him.
- That's why they brought the gifts that they did: Gold – fit for a king, Frankincense – fit for a priest, and Myrrh – fit for someone who was going to die a very important death for each one of us.
- That's why they worshipped this baby – imagine worshipping a baby!?

But they were able to see that this was not just any old baby, but that this was the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

To the human eye they saw nothing special, but to the eye of faith, prepared by God's revelation, they saw 'the King of the Universe' lying on that bed of straw and that's why they worshipped Him!

In **Conclusion** I want to ask you two questions:

1. Why is an ungodly world still prepared to make such a fuss at Christmas?
2. Why does that same ungodly world make so little fuss at Easter time?

I suggest to you that Christmas time, with a little **baby** in a manger, holds very little threat for them – it's just a heart-warming story in the middle of winter!

But Easter is slightly different – It's a story of a grown **man** called Jesus, being treated like a common criminal and being put to death on a cruel Roman cross for crimes he never committed. And if they stop and think long enough they'll realize he must have been hanging there for somebody else's sins, not his own. Maybe they do even realize that he was dying because of their sins.

That's just too much to cope with for many people in our world today!

But you cannot separate Christmas from Easter:

***The Man who died on that Cross at Easter,  
was the Baby who lay in that Crib at Christmas.***

He wasn't just a helpless little baby, He was God come in the flesh, to leave us without any excuse for not finding Him, and putting our trust in Him.

- He was the Saviour of the World, come to die for our sins.
- He was the King of Kings who will one day come to reign over us.
- He was the Creator of the World, come to rescue His Creation.

Sadly John had to say in vs.10-11 of his first chapter:

***'He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him,  
the world did not recognize Him!'***

***'He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive Him!'***

By and large, the world of His day, and ours, has rejected Him!

***Even though He was God's Greatest Gift;  
He is in fact the Unwanted Gift!***

But John goes on to say in v.12:

***'Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name,  
He gave the right to become Children of God!'***

Will you receive this Jesus as your Saviour tonight?

This baby did create the world; so He created you!

This baby did lie in a manger; but this baby also died on a cross to save you from your sins.

I want you to see past the Nativity Scene this Christmas, and see Jesus as your only hope of Salvation, the only way you can get right with God your Maker. Then put your trust in Him, while there is still time.

All the people in the Nativity Scene had to prepare for His First Coming.

All of us need to prepare for his Second Coming: Not as a baby, but as King of Kings and Lord of Lords – Then He will be either your Saviour or your Judge!

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