

## Comfort and Joy

*Does Christmas help bring us Comfort and Joy? Even during a pandemic?*

### 2020 an X-rated year

In Roman numerals, 20 is XX. And I guess for most of us 2020 has been an X-rated year! The main problem has of course been the pandemic. We've all been affected and many far worse than others. It has turned 2020 into the year that no-one wanted and one we hope not to relive in 2021!

In short 2020 has been a year of:

Despair, as we've struggled mentally with all the changes, threats and frustrations.

Distance, as many of us have been forced to stay apart from the ones we love

Death, as daily we are told of 100s of people in our country dying of the disease.

This is the year we have been given, so how do we deal with all these pressures?

Is Christmas the answer?

### Are Christmas Celebrations the Answer?

The one headline the government wanted to avoid is: Christmas is cancelled!

People need Christmas, they need a chance to celebrate at this dark time of year, even if the celebrations are being limited. We all need the present of Christmas! It's a unique and special time of year, that most of us look forward to with anticipation.

*Christmas present - with Merry Christmas on one side...*

Why does Christmas help?

There is **Christmas Glitter** - All the Christmas lights, jumpers and decorations, literally bring a prettiness and sense of joy to a time of year when the nights are long and cold. We love the Christmas glitter. It brings light and delight to the darkness.

Then there are the **Christmas Gatherings**. Of course these are more difficult this year, but all the debate about gatherings at Christmas shows how much we value bringing families who are otherwise distant together

Finally, there are **Christmas Gifts**. A chance to show our love and share our riches with those closest to us.

All of these things add up to Christmas being a great time of comfort and joy...

It is great to celebrate Christmas in these ways, but although Christmas may bring us a moment of comfort and joy in the midst of our struggles. Does it bring comfort and joy through the rest of the year? It may lift our spirits in December, but will it help us in January.

After Christmas, the gatherings are dispersed, the glitter has come down, the gifts have been eaten, broken or you've just become bored of them. If Christmas celebrations cannot bring us comfort and joy in January, then what can?

### Is the Christmas Message the Answer?

For Christians, the Christmas Celebrations are just the wrapping paper of Christmas.

It would be stupid to receive a present from someone at Christmas, admire its wrapping paper, then put it in a cupboard for the rest of the year! But if Christmas is just about the celebrations, then that is what you are doing!

It is good to celebrate Christmas, but Christmas is about the message not the celebrations. It is about the present not the paper!

So what is the Christmas message? Let's look at what the angels, God's messenger say to the shepherds:

**Despair turned to joy - "I bring you news of great joy"**

Firstly, it is a message of joy to a despairing world. The shepherds were nobodies, eking out a living under the oppression of a Roman overlord. They experienced illness and death far more than we do. They had no health service to be overwhelmed, no social security if they were injured or their flock was stolen or eaten by wolves. They had plenty of reason to despair, but the angels came to them and said: "I bring you news of great joy." This message about this new baby was to turn their despair into joy.

**Distance between heaven and earth overcome - "...born to you."**

So, what is it about the birth of Jesus that brings such joy out of despair? Well it is who he is. The angels say that the child has been, 'born to you.' That is a strange phrase to say to the shepherds. Surely, he was born to Mary? But Jesus was no ordinary baby and he grew up to be no ordinary man. He did amazing miracles, making the lame walk, the blind see, calming storms, feeding thousands and raising the dead. When they killed him, he rose again to live forever more. Jesus was like no other, because he came from God and was God, but he came to us.

Jesus's birth was God entering our world, God visiting us. Jesus came to reconcile man to God. He came to break down the barriers between heaven and earth. He came to deal with our separation from God.

**Death has been defeated - "Saviour..."**

And Jesus did not just come to visit us, he came as our 'Saviour.' Our greatest problem is death and covid-19 reminds us of that. Yet, even a vaccine to covid-19 won't stop us dying in the end. Jesus, however, defeated death in his resurrection and dealt with the cause of death, our sin in his death on the cross. Jesus may not save you from covid, but the one who conquered death itself has the power to save you from death too.

**Will you unwrap the present?**

So, will you unwrap the present? Will you look into God's gift? Or will you admire the wrapping paper and then put it away in the cupboard. A present can only do you any good if you open it.

The shepherds went to see if this was all true, the Magi travelled hundreds of miles to see Jesus. Will you come and look for yourself.

In her testimony, Tonya said that in January 2016 she was overwhelmed by grief. And her husband told her that 'she needed to go to church'. She did and began a journey of discovery and encounter with Jesus that changed her life.

I am glad you are watching our Christmas services. I hope you have enjoyed it so far. But don't just have your spirit lifted by the wrapping, come and discover God's wonderful gift.

Join us again at St. Luke's in January, when we will be looking at stories of different people encountering Jesus and what they discover about the blessing he brings to them.