

Christmas Day Sermon

Luke2:1-21

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Merry Christmas! My name is Bruce Stanley. I'm the Senior Minister here at St Phil's. If you're visiting, thanks for joining us today!

Well, Christmas Day is here. The wait is over. Are you relaxed now? Finished work, shopping, cooking?!

Ordinary Christmas

I have to be honest with you – it's difficult writing a Christmas sermon. It's really hard! Because it's same story every year! The Christmas message hasn't changed! Sure, we can choose different readings, but it's still the same story. Every year I think "Can I say it in a way that's more interesting?" Well, I can't. I'm all out of ideas. You know that feeling when you have 1 Christmas present left to buy and you've completely run out of ideas?

So this is a very ordinary Christmas sermon. Sorry.

But that's the thing about Christmas. It's very ordinary in the sense that it hasn't changed in 2000 years. It's predictable. Same characters. Same story line. God comes into the world in flesh. Virgin birth. Wise men. Shepherds. King Herod - Uh oh!

But that's the thing about the Christmas story in Luke 2. It's so "ordinary" with such "ordinary" people.

Like Joseph – verse 4

- *4So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.*

Good old Joseph. It was a Roman census so he had to go back home to register in his home town. He was a descendant of King David. So he went to Bethlehem for the census.

- *5He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.*

Ordinary right? He had a fiancé, Mary, who he was going to marry. And she was pregnant. But not with Joseph's child. With the son of God. But it's not a surprise, right? Because we've heard the story. "Ah yes! Poor Joseph! Imagine going back to your home town with that story!"

Then there are the shepherds. Out in the fields. Ordinary shepherds. Looking after ordinary sheep. An angel appears to tell them about the birth of Jesus. Verse 13:

- *13Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

Kindy stories

These verses always remind me of my story writing in Kindergarten. I always used the word “suddenly”. ‘Suddenly I woke up. And suddenly there before me was a monster. It moved. Suddenly. I ran down the hallway and suddenly there was my brother!’

My teacher would say: Bruce, please find another word to use instead of suddenly!”

But it’s all very fast paced, isn’t it. The angels suddenly appear and the shepherds are afraid but they go and find Jesus and worship him. Verse 15:

- *the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” 16So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.*

Nothing surprising there. We know the story. They find Mary. The young girl. The virgin. Pregnant with the Son of God. And how amazing is Mary’s response. V19:

- *19But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*

Even Mary isn’t surprised at the first Christmas! She’s just thinking through things. Treasuring them up and pondering them.

There’s nothing surprising in this story any more is there? It hasn’t changed, has it? There is nothing NEW to find this year.

- **Blank**

But that’s the point, isn’t it?

God’s story doesn’t change.

The Christmas story is the pivotal moment in HISTORY where God arrived in human flesh. Thousands of angels announced it to ordinary people. But it was GOD who was the extraordinary one doing extraordinary things.

Joseph is ordinary. The shepherds are ordinary. Mary is ordinary. And I bet the shepherds looked at Jesus in an animal feeding trough and thought **he** was pretty ordinary too. But what **God** was doing was **extraordinary**.

So we come back to Christmas each year and the story is still the same. But the question for us is this:

Have WE changed?

- **Blank**

This year, I have changed. Same change as usual – more weight, less hair.

Sometimes change is good. Sometimes it's difficult. Sometimes it's helpful. Sometimes it's annoying. But when it comes to Christmas, let me suggest this: Change is **necessary**. The story doesn't change. The story changes us.

Mary's was changed. Joseph was changed. The shepherds were changed. They didn't stay in the fields after seeing a few thousand angels and think: "No. Forget it. It's probably nothing." **They went and saw**. They were **changed**. In fact, this event changed every ordinary person in the story.

Joseph was **angry**, but then he trusts in God's plans. Mary was **overwhelmed** but she finds peace and contemplates what's happening. The Shepherds were **afraid** but find joy when they met the Saviour. Then they go and tell everyone.

The unchanging Christmas story is a story that changes us,

- Because the **extraordinary** work of God **changes ordinary** people like you and me.

Have you been changed by the Christmas story this year?

Illustration: lost

Last week a woman in Lightning Ridge, in North West NSW, fell down an 8 metre mine shaft. She was missing for two days. The thing is, she was only 100 metres from her camp. But she was lost. Not over 'there' or over 'there', but **down there**. So close, but lost down a deep, dark hole, only 100 metres away.

Sometimes Christmas gives us that feeling I think. We're not far from home but we're totally lost. Lost down one of the many holes of life. Christmas looks familiar, but we're so far away from the real meaning of it. Because we can be so focussed on **doing** Christmas – the shopping, the decorations, the church service, the carols singing – and we can forget that Christmas is about **being changed**, changed by the extraordinary work that GOD has done.

God has COME TO EARTH in the person of Jesus. He's come in flesh to save humanity through his death on the cross – he's done an amazing thing. So let's ask the question: Has it changed me? Has it changed me today? This week? This year? Have I been changed by what God has done?

It is so very easy to fall down a hole and get lost. It's easy to be so close to the truth but completely miss the meaning.

So we're hearing the same Christmas story again. So what? Aren't the best books you read the ones you read again and again? Aren't the best movies the ones you watch again and again?

Here we are at Christmas **again**. What does that mean? It means we hear the same story again, but this time we ask: "How will I be changed by Christmas this year?"

Like Joseph: Maybe I will walk back into church next week with an aim to trust God more in this year ahead.

Like Mary: Maybe I'll spend more time in my Bible this year just pondering and thinking about what God has done and let it sink in.

Or like the Shepherds: Maybe I'll be renewed in my excitement for Jesus and tell someone else about him, or invite them to church.

But here's the thing. No matter how much we try, the biggest change will come from allowing **God** to change **us**. It was the work of God in the lives of ordinary people on first Christmas that brought change. GOD came to earth. GOD became flesh. GOD came to save us by the death and resurrection of Jesus. And it's GOD who can change us ordinary people, from the inside out. GOD is the one who does the work of change in us.

- This is a great gift – the selfie toaster. It stamps your image on every piece of toast you make. Awesome!
- **Blank**

This is what God wants to do in our lives. He wants to stamp himself on our lives. He wants to say to us: "You are mine. Let me do the work of change in your life. Let me bring change to your life. Let me change your heart, day by day."

This year, how will you BE changed by the work of God?

God has done an amazing thing. Something that has changed the world. But has it changed you?

Let's pray.

SERMON OUTLINE

Ordinary Christmas

Ordinary Joseph

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. (4)

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. (5)

Ordinary Shepherds

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.” (13-14)

...the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (15-16)

Ordinary Mary

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. (19)

Extraordinary God

The *extraordinary* work of God changes *ordinary* people like you and me.

The trust of Joseph

The thoughtfulness of Mary

The excitement of the shepherds

Ordinary us, Extraordinary God.

The work of God in us

Luke 2:1-21

1In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2(This was the first census that took place while *2:2 Or This census took place before* Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3And everyone went to their own town to register.

4So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. **5He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.** 6While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11Today in the town of David a **Saviour** has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

13Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, **the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."**

16So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. **19But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.** 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

21On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named **Jesus**, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.