

## Believe and Receive from the Rejoicing Heart of God

*Isaiah 62:6-12; Psalm 97; Titus 3:4-8a; Luke 2:1-20*

Life changes when a baby comes into a family.  
But WOW the world was changed when this Baby came!

This is no myth or legend, even tho' it is getting treated in our society as a 'feel good' thing that is part of the nostalgia but for many not central at Christmas.

But this event of a baby in a cradle in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago is of momentous importance to our world.

This is not just any baby – this is The baby Jesus!

This birth was, and is, of momentous importance to God the Father – for it was His Son lying there vulnerable, coming into the world naked, not bringing any of His glory with Him, nor claiming privileges here. Born in socially suspect circumstances to a hard working, but faithful and reliable carpenter and to a young woman who so loved God that she was willing to have the most extraordinary pregnancy and birth, that would have been impossible to explain to even this zealously religious community.

This event reveals the heart of the Father.

When a person is drowning how far can you go to rescue them? For if you get in the turbulent waters with them without any aid you could find yourself in the same predicament as them and you too could drown or be dashed against the rocks by the sea.

But the Father – our Father's heart is so big that He couldn't leave us floating to a certain grave that led to it being eternally impossible to share His love and life.

What a risky rescue mission the Father sent His only Son on – out of love for us – *“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through Him.”* John 3:16-17

For God so loved the world ... God's motive was, and is, LOVE.

Christmas, when we stop to look at it, reveals some of the bigness of God's heart for us.

Then God's way, after diving into the centre of the problem with us – the centre of the greatest catastrophe ever –

God's way was a gentle way – starting as a defenceless baby and going to the torturous Cross and then to the empty tomb. A journey documented and proven. A real journey, not a sentimental, nostalgic one that is to be wheeled out once a year. A very real journey, with a very real focus and mission. Jesus was named for his mission. The name 'Jesus' means 'God saves'. Don't be deceived into believing that there are any other saviours.

Isaiah 9:2 *"the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."*

Isaiah 9:6 *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders"*

He will be known as the Prince of Peace and there will, in v 7, be no end to His government and peace.

Jesus came to save the world, nothing less.

And it was achieved in the most unlikely way.

The way is love.  
God's way is love.

Jesus didn't raise an army and conquer the wrong do-ers.  
Jesus did, as Titus 2 tells us, bring salvation to all (v 11).  
Jesus did give Himself to redeem us from all wickedness (v 14).  
Jesus did purify for Himself a people that are His own, a people eager to do good (v 14).

Jesus did it all with love.  
Love that laid His life down for us.  
Love that gave blessed hope (Titus 2:13).  
Love that purified us (v14).

Jesus did it with love, revealing the Father's heart and the Father's desire.

One way I know this is that the angels say to the shepherds: *"do not be afraid. I bring you news of great joy, that will be for all people..."*

Angels are messengers that are sent. Sent in this case from heaven, from the Father to announce this great rejoicing in heaven and on earth. Good news for us. *"Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you: He is Christ the Lord."*

Notice the words: “*born to you*” ie us.

The angels are rejoicing, the heavens are rejoicing, because in the plan of God to save humans, the time has come. This time had been foretold by the prophets. The mission of the Christ is known in heaven – and we all know with hindsight what the cost of that mission will be in order for it to be completed.

Yet there is rejoicing – over this good news, the glad tidings.

The plan of redemption flows from a God who eagerly anticipates the intimacy He will have with His people for eternity.

Not long before His death Jesus told about the king who gave a wedding feast for his son.

That is what Jesus is eagerly awaiting for.

Jesus had a rejoicing heart – “*Who for the joy set before Him endured the Cross*”

Jesus made it very clear that the Father and He are one. His heart is like the Father’s. They feel the same way.

God not only likes us, God loves us and is so passionate about His love for us He is preparing us to marry His Son – if we so want it.

There is another part to be known in the Christmas story. For the Father’s heart’s desire to come true it needs a response from us.

For Christmas is not just remembering although that is good.

Christmas is not just gift giving to remind us of God’s gift to us, although that is good.

Christmas has a most important part to it that will make the difference for you and me for eternity – offered with love and achieved by love, paid for with love. Won with love.

And the clue to what it means for you and me is in John1:12 “*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God*”

Believe

Receive

Then belong!

It is as simple as that: **believe, receive and belong.**

There are many who have trouble believing. If you are one of them, and I was many years ago, I encourage you to explore the evidence thoroughly – go through the Scriptures, and other sources about Jesus' life, like an investigate journalist and examine the evidence. Keep seeking.

There are some here who believe but have not yet received. Yet we are told *all who receive Him become children of God.*

This is why the baby that changed the world came so that we could be adopted into God's extraordinary, unique, eternal family.

So if there are any here that believe but haven't yet received I invite you to pray a simple prayer in your hearts telling Jesus that you receive Him this Christmas.

Tonight/today I am providing an opportunity for a response should you so wish. You are invited but none have to do it. After the sermon finishes we are going to sing 'Away in a Manger'. As we sing that we are invited to come up to the manger and place a piece of straw in it.

Now this has a meaning:

- For some it may mean: "I'm not there yet in believing but I want to know more."
- For some it may mean: "I believe"
- For some it may be saying, "I believe and this night/day I choose to receive You Jesus and choose to belong to You".
- Or it may be that you have already believed and received for some time and You want to come forward to say Thank You to God for His big heart, and His big, huge love gift – His Son – to you, that He has given with rejoicing in His heart!

Let us pray: