

## Christmas Day

Lectionary passages: Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

I don't know about you but one of the most annoying Christmas songs is:

“Santa Claus is Coming to Town” (DON’T start singing it in your head!)



You know, the verse that goes:

*“He sees you when you’re sleeping  
And he knows when you’re awake  
He knows if you’ve been bad or good  
So be good for goodness sake”*

It's not only annoying because we hear it again and again in the shops.

It couldn't be more wrong.

It says: “Be good and you'll get good stuff. Be bad and you won't get good stuff”.

That's what most Australians think the message of Jesus is. Good people go to heaven. Bad people go to hell. (But then, hey, who wants to go to boring old heaven, when all my mates will be in the other place?)

Is that really what God says? Is it really that Christmas is all about seeing how good you've been?

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NO! NO! say the angels. NO! NO! say the apostles. NO! NO! says the Lord Jesus himself.

Listen how our epistle for today says it: *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all people* (Titus 2:11)

Listen how the angel in that lovely gospel passage says it: *“Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.* (Luke 2:11)

Listen how the Lord Jesus himself says it: *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* (John 3:16)

Does God really say: Be good – and go to heaven, like that annoying song says?

Doesn't he really say – “be perfect and go to heaven”? Be absolutely perfectly obedient to me? Be totally committed in your heart to living your life my way? *“You are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”*?

The trouble is that that put like that it leaves no room for excuses, or slip-ups, or a bad day or blaming others or to claim “it's too hard”. Now, if we really take that on board, it leads to real despair.

*A friend had a man challenge him by saying: “I don't buy this talk of how difficult it is to be perfect or even good. I bet I can go without sinning for*

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*a week". "OK", said my friend. "I'll see you next week". When the guy came back the next week he looked very sheepish. "How did you go?" asked my friend. "It's not fair!" said the man. "I started a new job during the week and that was my undoing." "Really? That must have been good. And did you achieve your aim of not sinning for the week?" "No" said the man. "I started working as a used car salesman!"*

Into this muddled and human-centred way of thinking, this confusion about God and his attitude to us, our pathetic attempts to be "good" and our often angry rejection of God and his ways or worse, and worse still, into our apathy about him, comes the stupendous announcement of the angel, the apostles and the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

*"Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.(Luke 2)*

The point is who that One is, and why, and how he came.

The angel said to the shepherds: he is a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

That baby was God himself. As that lovely new Christmas song, "Mary, did you know?" says

*Mary did you know that your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?*

*Mary did you know that your baby boy will calm a storm with his hand?*

*Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod?*

*And when you kiss your little baby, you have kissed the face of God?*

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Everyone loves a baby, although sometimes it's very painful even to hold one when you yourself have no children. This baby is no-one less than the Lord God, creator and ruler of the universes, whose "*hands flung stars into space*", who "*upholds the universe by his powerful word*" (Hebrews 1:3)

But why? What's the point? Why did God stoop to becoming truly and perfectly human, when everything that is belongs to him for he made it?

Answer: Because he came as "a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Christ"

(Christ, or Messiah wasn't his surname, by the way. You couldn't look him up in the Nazareth phone book under C or M depending on whether you spoke Greek or Hebrew). It's a title. He was THE Messiah, THE Christ. That is – the one long-promised in the Old Testament who would be God's unique anointed king. King of the Universe. The Ruler of all people and all things.

Here is God himself, the creator and ruler of all things come near as the rightful King and Lord.

But also, and this is the point of Christmas, the baby is born to be "a Saviour". A rescuer. A life saver.

You know, the truth of the matter is that for all we may joke about how Australians misunderstand the message of the Bible and the message of Christmas as being all about goodness, God is deadly serious. Deadly serious about how deep the trouble is that we humans are in. And no matter whether it's the slaughter of his opponents by Kim Jong-Un; or the

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environmental rape of landscape by greedy oil barons in Indonesia; or the suicide bomber; or the violent spouse; or the depravity involved in much religion; or my pitiful attempts at loving God and loving my neighbour, There's hell to pay. "*The wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23)

But A Rescuer has come! God has sent the perfect Saviour. *The grace of God, the undeserved love of God that brings salvation has appeared to all people!* Says Paul. The rescue mission has been completed. For that baby grew up and at 33 years of age bore in his own body the full consequences of all our sin.

What is it we will soon remember in the Communion? "Through him God has reconciled us to himself by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all upon the cross."

The good news of Christmas is precisely that we are not good enough. But that God still, in his grace, gave us a good thing. Jesus purchased forgiveness for every sin you will ever commit by his death on the cross. We will be remembering that as we eat bread and drink wine together in a few moments. His love for us is not based on whether we've been bad or good. We haven't been good. We are not good. We have all turned our backs on our creator God and so deserve punishment and death.

But we don't have to get what we deserve. By the grace of God, forgiveness and adoption into his family can be ours. God has come to give the best gift to the worst people. Odd as it may seem, bad people, who recognize they are not good in the eyes of God but who then reach out to the Saviour for rescue get heaven. Those who don't face up and fess up that they're not as good as they pretend get the other place.

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Which is it for you this Christmas?