A Life Changing Christmas

So, when our friend Professor Tick-Tock discovered that Christmas is true, it turned his world upside down. Now, I know that Tick-Tock's just make-believe, but the power of Christmas to change our lives isn't. Because if you read St. Luke's account in his gospel, you realise that the events of Christmas have been having that same life-changing effect ever since Jesus' birth was first announced.

The angel appeared to the shepherds and St Luke tells us, 'they were filled with great fear' (Luke 2:9). But by the end, having found this baby for themselves, Luke tells us they returned, 'Glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen' (2:20).

So what is it about Christmas that can turn fear, like the shepherds', into joy? What is it about the events of Christmas that has the power to change lives?

Well listen again to what the angel said to those shepherds: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (2:10) So the angel is going to tell them some news: not the kind of bad news that tragically fills our newspapers, but news so great, so good that it will bring us joy. So, what is that news?

Well, the angel goes on: "For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord' (2:11).

So Christmas is life-changing because this baby, who's just been born, is a saviour. Now, imagine one of those old films, and the baddie has tied our heroine to the railway tracks, and the train is coming towards her. But then, in the nick of time, our hero appears, cuts through the ropes, lifts her up and rescues her. What will she say to him? 'O you've saved me! You're my saviour.' Because that's what a saviour is, isn't it? It's someone who saves us from something much worse.

But when Jesus was born, your average Jewish person wasn't worried about trains coming down the track. What people wanted was to be rescued from their enemies, the Romans. They wanted a saviour who would sort out their political problems. And if you think about it, that's so often what we want, isn't it? Not so much the politics, though that'd be great, but to have the circumstances of our lives sorted. If only this area of my life, this problem, or this relationship, or that person could be put right, I could be happy, I'd be ok.

And yet Jesus didn't come to sort out the external stuff, not first and foremost anyway. He didn't come to save us from our circumstances, but as the angel said to Joseph, 'You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins' (Matt 1:21).

You see, there are those moments, aren't there, when you and I stop, and we stop just long enough to reflect, and we know deep down that so often it's not our circumstances that need changing, it's our hearts. And God knows that much better than we do, so he sends a saviour to save us from our sin and from ourselves.

But then the angel gives Jesus another title: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour *who is Christ the Lord*" (2:11) And that word Christ means Messiah – the anointed one, the chosen one. Now, if I were to come to you and take you by the arm, and say, 'you're my chosen one' you'd look at me and think 'er, chosen for what?' Well, the Old testament prophets prepare us for what the Messiah had been chosen to do: to save his people, by giving his life for them, and to be the one to whom God gave authority and power to rule. Which is why the angel calls Jesus, 'the Lord.'

Now over time, you and I can become a bit cynical and, rightly or wrongly, we can begin to see our political leaders as part of the problem not the solution. And, at least in part, our frustration is because deep down we want leaders who will lead uprightly, we want governments who will govern for the good of the people and the good of the world. not for their own gain or agenda. So deep down we want leaders – or to use the angel's word *a Lord* - who will serve and lay down his life for his people. And the rest of the Bible tells us that Jesus is just such a Lord.

But the incredible thing is that when St Luke uses that word *Lord*, elsewhere he uses it to refer to God. So Christmas has this power to transform our lives when we realise that the one who can save us from our sin has come, and it's God himself.

But there's a second reason Christmas is life-changing. And that's because of where these shepherds find him.

Listen to the angel again: "And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (2:12). So imagine you were there that night and heard the angel say your saviour and Lord has been born, you'd be thinking, 'so where can I find him? And how will I know when I've found him? Will I find this Lord in a palace, or in one of the places of power? Will I find him wearing a crown, or ruling from a golden throne? Is he driving around in a first century equivalent of an armoured limousine, a turbo charged donkey?' No. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in an animal's feeding trough. You'll find him in all the mess and the smell of a stable.

Now we live in a tiny village with no less than five farms and our nearest neighbours are cows. In fact, this summer, two cows decided to jump into our garden and eat our vegetable patch. So I know all about barns and stables and what you find in them. And you don't find Lords being born in stables.

But this one was. The Lord of Lords and King of kings. And when you realise that that is what this Saviour and Lord has done, Christmas becomes life-changing. Because when you know that in Jesus, God himself has entered your world, and he didn't come to the wealthy or the powerful, but humbled himself and came to the very bottom and entered the mess of your world, to save you, it is deeply humbling. Because you begin to realise something of how much he loves you and how much you need him.

But as I finish, just think for a moment what Jesus is doing being born in a stable. Why did he end up there? Why's Mary giving birth there and not in a posh hotel? Because, St Luke tells us, "there was no place for them in the inn" (2:7). The local hotels made no space for him. The rich and the powerful, men like King Herod and Governor Quirinius, made no space for him. Religious people and their leaders had no room for him.

So let me finish by asking you a question: this Christmas, will *you* give him room? Because if you will, Christmas can change your life. If you follow the shepherds and discover for yourself that what the angel said is true, then it will be as much good news of great joy for you as it was for them. Because your Saviour and Lord has come. And that is life changing.