

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given.
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.*

The “good news of great joy” that the angel promised at Jesus’ birth is that God now offers to everyone the free gift of eternal life, if they will humbly receive it from him.

Jesus' Noisy Followers

What Jesus came to do was so extraordinary and so wonderful that those who have received his forgiveness want to tell others. It’s why the person who gave you this leaflet offered it to you. It’s why churches want you to come at Christmas and Easter and other times of the year as well! At its heart, Christianity is not about dry rituals or annoying rules – but about a liberating, joyful relationship with God through his Son, Jesus.

One of the most hurtful things that can happen to us is when our love is rejected. Imagine that you have spent a long time choosing a special Christmas gift to give to someone you care deeply for. On Christmas morning, they look at the label to see who it is from, and then throw it away, unopened.

Sadly, this is how many people treat the greatest gift that has ever been offered to us.

God made us and knows us intimately, with all our failings and weaknesses, and yet he loves us beyond measure. So much so that he sent

his Son to die for us. That is why the Bible writers give their strongest warnings to those who reject the precious gift God offers to us in his Son.

So the most important thing any of us can do this Christmas is to accept the gift that God is holding out to us. The words below might help you talk to him, quietly in your own heart.

A Christmas Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, 

Thank you for sending Jesus into the world on that first Christmas Day.

Thank you that he died to rescue me from sin.

Thank you that he rose again and is the everlasting light.

I’m sorry for pushing you out of your rightful place in my life. Please forgive me.

Please come into my life as my Saviour, Lord, Teacher and Friend,
and help me to live for you from now on. Amen

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**the good book**
COMPANY


O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep
and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by:

Silence should be the last thing that we associate with Christmas – the tearing of wrappers, the whoops of delight (or dismay) at their contents, and the blaring of the TV– not to mention the clatter of plates, and the shrieks from the kitchen when it all goes horribly wrong...

A Noisy Birth

It seems strange, then, that silence should be associated with Christmas (*Silent Night... How still we see thee lie...*), when Bethlehem must have been anything but silent on that first Christmas day. Anyone who has visited a maternity ward knows that childbirth is rarely quiet! And the Bible's account of Jesus' birth is full of noise too – from the joyous singing of the angels as they lit up the night sky to the steady traffic of well-wishers and other strange visitors to the manger.

No, the arrival of Jesus was a noisy affair – and rightly so. His coming marked the beginning of the end of God's plan to put the world right. As the angel said to the bewildered shepherds:

Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.

Luke 2 v 10-11

Christmas is a time for noisy celebration, because Jesus' arrival in the world is good news for all people. That's because Jesus came to save us. It's

what the name "Jesus" actually means: a saviour or rescuer. He came to deal once and for all with our sin, which separates us from God.

★ A Glorious Light

The birth of a child is filled with optimism. What will she become? What will he do? What impact will they have on other people and the world? The visit from the angel-amazed shepherds, and the arrival of gift-bearing oriental wise men made it clear to his human parents that Jesus was no ordinary baby. And as they watched him grow, they began to see who he was. He taught with great power, insight and authority; sickness, demons and death fled at his command; and even nature obeyed his voice.

Such power would corrupt most people. But what shone through from this incredible man was a heart of deep love and compassion for everyone he met. It's why John sums up his life like this:

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1 v 2-4

Why Did Jesus Come?

But Jesus was born for a particular purpose. He was born to do a particular job. These verses from the Old Testament explain what it was:

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

Isaiah 53 v 7

Strange as it may seem, the main reason that Jesus was born into our world was *so that he could die!* The verse quoted above is from a part of the Bible written 600 years before the first Christmas. It tells of a suffering servant who would be the sacrifice to end all others. His death would deal with human sin and wrongdoing. And it would turn aside God's wrath against us for the way we have ruined ourselves, each other and the world he gave us to care for.

Jesus fulfilled these words when he died on the first Good Friday. He was silent before his corrupt accusers, and suffered the agony of death in silence. He bore the punishment that you and I justly deserve for the way we have rejected God's rightful rule in our lives.

Silently at Work

And when Jesus rose again on that first Easter Day, the final phase of God's great plan started. Jesus is alive today, and is at work in the world, reaching out to us in his mercy. He calls everyone to follow him and to rely on his death on the cross to put us into a right relationship with God the Father. As the Christmas carol says: