

Peace & Hope for Troubled Times

Christmas 2020 Video Sermon Guide

[This sermon guide below has been developed in conjunction with the video Peace & Hope in Troubled Times available at <https://vimeo.com/469593407>, and represents a framework you can build on. Typically, Christmas sermons are delivered before audiences that include many people who don't have much faith at all. It's a great opportunity to use testimony to augment a monologue. A well-chosen testimony can underline key points in the sermon and help people place what otherwise may be some abstract points into the life of someone they can relate to.]

Introduction

Living in a western country we easily become blasé about the certainties of life:

- Functional essential services.
- Fantastic roads and transport.
- Excellent healthcare.
- Peace and stability.
- Career pathways and opportunities.
- Weekly, monthly and annual rhythms, seasons and cycles.
- The ease of travel and promise of holidays.
- Rites of passage: birthdays, wedding, funerals, graduations, etc.

Into this settled world where so much is a given, Covid-19 intruded. Unlike the bushfires which preceded the spread of Covid, this was a situation that affected every community in Australia, every country in the world. Most Australians born after the last World War would not have known times like these.

It has introduced uncertainty about the future in everybody. Many skilled workers have seen their industries decimated and jobs destroyed. We simply don't know what the future holds anymore. Even once we see our country opened up, we don't know when it will be shut down again.

This upending of the apple cart of life has left many living in fear, with a constant sense of not being at ease. With the loss of confidence in the future is a sense of unease, a lack of peace about the world and our place in it.

For the post-God generation, this has been a tremendous shake up. Where do people in a post-God generation turn to when such an overwhelming disaster changes our world and shreds our world view? Where do people turn to for hope?

The Hope and Joy of New Life

There is something about a newborn baby that is unparalleled. New life is mesmerising and infectious. It draws people. Social media has granted us daily insights into the lives of new mothers: in rapture about the wonder of life. Despite the challenges of a firstborn, mothers and fathers become transfixed by the miracle of life.

 [Consider playing a video or conducting a live interview with one or more mothers and fathers of newborn babies.]

The Gift of Jesus

Jesus was born into a world that was in upheaval. Thanks to an order from the Roman Emperor for a census of all people to be taken in their hometown, Mary and Joseph had to travel for several days to Bethlehem. As a result, Jesus was born into humble circumstances during a chaotic and violent time in the history of Palestine following on from the death of King Herod.

He was given the name Emmanuel, which first appeared in a prophecy hundreds of years before in Isaiah 7:14 which says,
“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign; The virgin will conceive, and give birth to a Son, and will call Him Emmanuel” (NIV).

God first spoke the promise of Emmanuel to ancient Judah’s king Ahaz. Assyrian forces occupied the land and it was a tumultuous and fearful time for the king and his people. God offered King Ahaz a choice between trusting God or suffering defeat from his enemies. In Isaiah 7:9 God said, *“If you do not stand firm in faith, you will not stand at all”* (NIV). Then, God offered him a sign, but Ahaz refused, so God gave His own sign, one that would be fulfilled long after Ahaz’s demise and passing.

Jesus, God’s Son, was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. He was the long-promised Emmanuel, sent by God to save His people and usher in a new kingdom, the same one we can participate in. He came as the mediator between God and man, as our Redeemer and Saviour. When Christ came to earth, he quite literally became “God with us.” God entered the world bringing himself as a gift, to enable us to experience joy, peace and hope through his presence and his promises.

Hope for 2021 and Beyond

The peace and confidence that has been stripped away by a turbulent year have been shown to be shallow and transient. Jesus lived and had his being among us. He showed us the way to the Father and then paved that way Himself through his death on the cross.

We don't know that things will get better soon, or whether the world will continue to be disrupted by pandemics in the near future. 2020 has proven that we can have little confidence in the usual order of things. Order and predictability have been taken out of our hands.

We know through encountering Christ that we can have peace despite chaos, joy in the midst of sorrow, confidence in the face of uncertainty, and hope for the future. The key significance of the birth of Christ is that we can move forward with God and encounter him in all circumstances. Christ eventually went to the Cross and paved the way for us to have peace with God.

Emmanuel, God with us, changed the world. In that moment when God became flesh, humanity watched prophecies unfold as hope was born. Jesus provided hope that sin and death wouldn't always win and mankind wouldn't always feel so painfully alone when stripped of false certainties and assumptions.

 *[Consider playing a video or conducting a live interview with someone who has come to know Christ in the last year.]*