

CONTACT

Christmas

noun, from Old English

annual festival celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ often including a church service, family meal, exchange of gifts, shared entertainment, visiting friends, colourful decorations;

a time of peace and goodwill



Peace and Goodwill?

Christmas is often described as the season of peace and goodwill. But the Bible's story of the first Christmas, when Jesus was born, often seems like the opposite of that.

Take Joseph. When you meet him in the Bible's Christmas Story, he's in a dilemma. His fiancée is pregnant but the child isn't his. Separation seems like his only realistic option. Not so peaceful.

Yet, this is part of the story of the first Christmas.

Or Elizabeth, who has longed for a child over many years, but it has never happened. Now the time has gone and she has had to accept that.

This is part of the story of the first Christmas.

Or the little family of three who find a home in their chosen location and get to live there for two years. But then a local warlord turns on them, violence appears on the streets and they end fleeing for their lives over the border.

This is part of the story of the first Christmas.

Or Simeon, a dying man who could see that days of antagonism and upset were just around the corner in his beloved homeland.

This is part of the story of the first Christmas.

Or look at Mary, Jesus' mother. Newly married but circumstances mean that she and her husband cannot consummate their love. Do you think that was easy for either of them?

This is part of the story of the first Christmas.

And then there's the baby at the heart of the story. Jesus was born into a society torn apart by injustice and pride, both of which he would personally experience in a deeply painful way - more than that: in a deadly way.

This is part of the story of the first Christmas.

The Bible's account of the first Christmas, when Jesus Christ was born, is not a simple tale of happy families and a jolly winter festival. It's not a story that easily lends itself to bright decorations, happy songs, presents, food, drink, entertainment, holidays and get-togethers. Rather, because it's a

true story and not a fairytale or myth, it includes life with all its harsh realities. It has the real dilemmas, distresses and decisions the world produces.

The first Christmas often seems not to be about peace and goodwill at all.

We can relate to that - we really can. Christmas 2018 for many will not be all about peace and goodwill. For some the season will include points of pain, sadness, loneliness or family hurt. Despite all its promise, Christmas can bring out the worst in us or remind us of scars in our lives, especially in our relationships. The missing sister from the dinner table. The absent father from the games. The child who won't be opening any presents. The arguments which we sense will come. The behaviour which will embarrass. The look of hatred we don't want to see. The pretence of a friendliness we don't feel. The relationship which doesn't develop. The hiding in alcohol or food. The financial fears. Or simply an emptiness within.

Modern Christmases often seem not to be about peace and goodwill, either.

So we may long for Christmas to be a wonderful time, but the reality doesn't always match the dreams. We know that in our own lives. The Bible's story of the first Christmas is true to that.

However, the story is not like some gritty, TV drama which leaves you with the sense that the world is often a dark place and that's the way it has to be, so get used to it. It may be realistic, but it also brings huge hope in the midst of the despair, light into the darkness.

Peace and goodwill can be found in the centre of the first Christmas.

How? At the core of the Bible's Christmas is this news: that into a world which has been mangled by us in so many ways, has come someone to bring wonderful repair. This is Jesus, whom the Bible describes as born to be the Saviour. It's an expressive word which captures what's gone wrong in the world, namely: us. All of us have walked away from God, our creator. As a result all of us

have lost touch with what we were made to be: the children of God. To cope with that we've come up with our range of solutions and answers to life, none of which really satisfies and many of which make matters worse. We live our own way and it doesn't work, causing the hurt and pain we are all so familiar with. We are far from God, often doing what offends him. The Bible calls this 'sin'. But Jesus was born to grow up into the man who would bring us back to God.

This is at the centre of the story of the first Christmas.

The cost for him to do this would be high. We are not surprised by that. Anything worth achieving in this world comes at a price. Anything which overcomes the darkest areas of life inevitably involves pain. That was true to the highest degree for Jesus. His life would be unfairly cut short. Why? Due to the hatred of those around him. But why would God allow that, if Jesus was from God? To show God's justice. Our actions against God demand punishment, as any foul behaviour does. Jesus willingly stepped in to face that on behalf of others. What he suffered was a public display of God's reaction to our sin. Jesus was born with death hanging over him.

This, too, is at the centre of the story of the first Christmas

But when justice had been seen to be done, then miraculous hope came. Jesus had committed no sin himself - he could not, because he was God's eternal Son. So God raised him from the dead. And in that moment, a new day dawned for the world. We all die. We all die because our sin has wrecked our world. Cut off from God, we are cut off from life. But through what he did, Jesus can forgive our sin and give life back to us. We still die. But those who come to believe in Jesus, are given a hope of resurrection: a return to life.

That is where the story of the first Christmas leads us.

That is why this season, for Christians, truly is one of peace and goodwill, which is well worth celebrating. Come and find out for yourself. You have to start with a humble admission that whilst there is a lot wrong in the world around you, there is also a lot wrong inside of you too. Jesus calls each of us to face up to that. But to those honest and willing enough to do so, he then offers forgiveness and an unbreakable hope, in the midst of all life's shame, let-downs and problems. Each person who personally trusts in him, is brought back to God as their Father, to gain a place in his everlasting family.

Peace and goodwill truly are at the heart of the first Christmas.

David Last
Pastor of Forest Baptist Church

INVITATION

Join us at one of our Christmas services to discover the magnificent, true story of the birth of Jesus Christ

Sun 23rd Dec
10.30am

Sun 23rd Dec
5.00pm

Christmas Day
10.30am

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

(The Bible - Luke's Gospel)



Forest Baptist Church

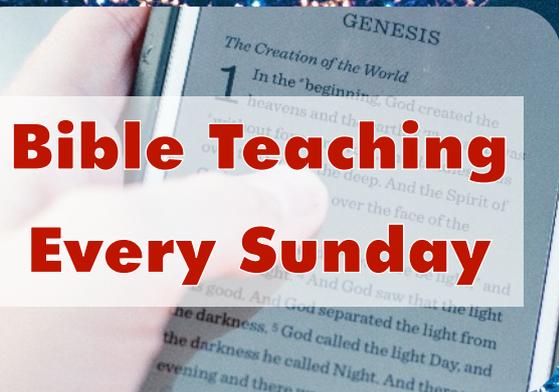
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☎ 020 0222 6801
📱 07707 052 227 (text/whatsapp only)
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🌐 forestbaptist.org.uk

To contact our pastor, David Last, just use the details above.



Sunday Services

Morning : 10.30am
Evening : 5.00pm



Bible Teaching
Every Sunday

Friday Club

* 3.30-5.00pm * Term Time *
* For ages 5-11 * FREE *
Get in touch with Pauline on
07895 112 915

Justtalk

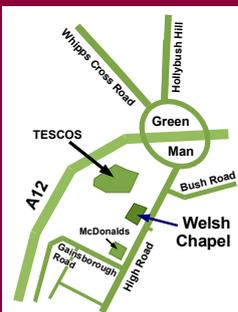
An informal group which gets together in Leytonstone every fortnight. Come and meet others, discuss an issue, seek advice or, even, simply practise your English. To find out more, visit:

forestbaptist.org.uk/justtalk

FREE ENGLISH CLASSES



Contact Ferris on 07727 082 449
or ferrislindsay@gmail.com



Forest Baptist uses the Welsh Chapel on the High Road in Leytonstone, halfway between McDonald's and the Green Man Roundabout. Buses 66, 145, 257, W13, W14 and W19 all stop outside. The Tube station is just over half a kilometre away. A few car parking spaces are available on the site. Some of our activities occur in other locations. Please get in touch to find out times and places.