

Christmas Service 2024: The Appearing of our Saviour

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Preacher: Baru Bian

- [0 : 0 0] A few years ago, my wife and I decided to drive to our farm at Ruanacang. I think many of you have heard of this farm.
- 3,000 feet above sea level in Lawas Highland. It was a gorgeous sunny day. And I thought to myself, today is a great day to drive.
- No need to call my cousin to drive us up this time. Usually he would do that. But I felt adventurous the day. I mean, how hard could it be?
- I mean, YB also can drive, kan? I'm sure the roads would also respect that, yeah? Well, turns out, logging country roads don't care about status or titles.
- About 30 minutes away from our farm, just after passing the Mararap logging camp, if you know the place, the car decided to humble me.
- [1 : 0 1] Smoke began pouring out of the engine. And before I could even say, what's happening? The car stole right in the middle of a steep hill.
- Now, I'll admit something here. You know, I know as much as fixing a car as I know how to pilot a rocket. But, in fact, my wife, bless her heart, she knows more than me in terms of car engines.
- So it's both very impressive and slightly embarrassing. So here we were stranded. No phone signal, no nearby shops. Just two of us and a car that refused to budge.
- And while I was silently praying for a miracle, a vehicle came from the opposite side, the opposite direction, and stopped just in front of us.
- Now, here's one of the unwritten rules in country roads. If someone is stranded, you stop and check if you can help.
- [2 : 0 7] It's a basic road karma, we call it. Because one day, you may be the same person in the same spot. So the driver stepped out and looked at me and exclaimed, Oh, why be ya?
- Of course, they recognized me, lah. A small group of people came. They all gathered around, trying to diagnose the problem, but no one could fix it.
- As they left, the driver did something remarkable. Without telling me, without telling us, he radioed out a message on his walkie-talkie to all the drivers on the truth of that logging road.
- And also, he let the logging camp people know that the YB is straight under the hill. Assist him, if you can.
- So, not long after that, about 15 minutes left, a car from the logging camp pulled up, outstapped the mechanic, who greeted me with a cheerful high ankle.
- [3 : 1 1] You know who he was? My nephew, Charles Gur, his name. He had received the message from the driver and came to the rescue.

He inspected the car, he identified the problem, and fixed it on the spot. But that's not all. He even offered to drive behind us, all the way to Ruanajang, and just left us at the front gate of the farm.

They showed that we were safely back at the farm. Talk about VIP treatment, yeah? Now, why I'm telling you this? Because that day taught me something profound.

Not just about cars, but about life and faith. Help came not because I asked for it, but because someone saw the need and acted.

A chain reaction of kindness and responsibility ensured that my wife and I reached our destination safely. Church, this is the essence of Christmas.

[4 : 21] Long before we knew we needed saving, God prepared the ultimate gift of grace through the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So the story of Christmas is not an afterthought, but a divine plan written before the foundation of the world. And this is stated clearly in the passage that was read towards this morning by the new reader.

So the title, if you are trying to get some notes of a sermon this morning, is the appearing of our Savior. But I add in three, four words after that.

The appearing of our Savior, the gift of grace. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity and the privilege this morning to have your word read in our midst.

This passage brings us back to the beginning of time where you have planned from the very beginning of salvation plan for mankind to be brought back to yourself and eventually revealed to the birth of Jesus Christ on Christmas Day.

[5 : 30] I pray that this message of love, of grace, and of your mercy be made fresh once again to all the hearers here this morning. And in Jesus' name I pray.

The gift of grace. I believe we have no problem with understanding of this word gift because we always give gifts to our family members and friends.

And we also do receive gifts from them as well. If something given free, out of our gratitude to someone that we love.

In fact, Christmas season is a season of giving and receiving gifts. I'm sure you must have received some yesterday or even this morning.

But grace or charis in Greek word had been understood to mean the unmerited favor and kindness of God towards humanity.

[6 : 33] unmerited favor and kindness of God towards humanity. Beautiful word, beautiful meaning. And I suggest young couples, next daughter, name her Charis.

It is his free and undeserved gift of love, forgiveness, salvation, and blessing, given not because of anything we have done, but solely because of his goodness and mercy.

So Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians of this grace when he said, For it is by grace you have been saved. Through faith.

And this is not from yourself. It is the gift of God. Not by works, so that no one could boast.

Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8 to 9. So now in the context of our sermon title, let us get to the very beginning. And if I were to ask you, where did the story of Christmas begin?

[7 : 46] I'm very certain, almost probably more than half of you will tell me that Christmas began in Bethlehem.

Well, after all, all the Christmas cards that we have seen, sent, and received, all these years depict Bethlehem as the venue for the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

And the Bible tells us that the angels announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherd, just outside Bethlehem. The three wise men came to worship baby King Jesus, who followed the star, and rested over Bethlehem, where Jesus was born.

So perhaps, we thought that it's Bethlehem, where Christmas began. Sorry guys, based on the text this morning, Christmas did not start in Bethlehem.

It began in the Garden of Eden. I'm sure, all of us have heard of the story of the fall. That is, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and sin entered the world, humanity was separated from God.

[9 : 00] Yet, even as judgment fell, God gave a promise, a seed of hope. that's the first point, this morning.

The promise of grace, the seed of hope. So in Genesis 3, verse 15, God said, to the serpent, I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed, and her seed.

He shall bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel. The NIV used the word, your offspring, and you will strike your head, and you will strike your heel.

In fact, this is the first prophecy in the Bible, that speaks of this Savior, of the coming of Jesus, and the first whisper of Christmas, in the Garden of Eden.

So emerging from the fall, and through the judgment of God, God declared that a descendant of Eve, would one day, crush the head, of Satan.

[10 : 09] Defeating sin and death. But in the process, of crushing, the head of Satan, Satan will, bruise his heel. As I said in NIV translated it, as striking his heel.

So here, the Bible tells us, that Jesus, the seed, of the woman, or the offspring of the woman, will be bruised, by Satan, which we all know now, referring to Jesus' death, on the cross.

But in order to crush, Satan's head, Jesus must die. He must die first, then, he will rise from his death, to conquer death itself.

And that victory over death, was evidence, in his resurrection, from the grave, which we will see, and there is a bit much, much more later. So in our text this morning, from 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 9b, Paul reminds further, that this plan of salvation, was not a reaction to sin, but a purpose, established before time.

But Paul said, and I quote him, this grace, was given us, in Christ Jesus, before the beginning of time. Before the beginning of time.

[11 : 30] His plan was unfolded, and ready to roll, as it were. Even, even, immediately, after Adam and Eve, fell into sin, when all seemed, to have been lost.

therefore, the birth of Jesus, is the fulfillment, of that ancient promise. He is the seed, born in Bethlehem, who destroyed, the power of sin and death, and that seed, took a long time, to sprout and grow, since it was sown, in Genesis.

But eventually, thank God, it bore fruit, for the first, Christmas morning. Now, fast forward, through history, as you see, the unfolding, of God's plan, in John 1, verse 1 to 3, we are told, that Jesus is, the word, of the Lord.

He is the word, who was with God, in the beginning. He is the creator, of all things, and is the source, of life. In the beginning, was the word.

And the word, was with God. And the word, was God. He was with God, in the beginning. In him, was life. And that life, was the light, of all mankind.

[12 : 54] Then, comes, the stunning revelation, in verse 14. Then, the word, became flesh, and made his dwelling, among us. We have seen, his glory, the glory of the one, and only son, who came from the father, full of grace, and truth.

Wow. Praise the Lord. Our second point, the revelation of grace, the word, became flesh.

Church, if you were asked, what is Christmas? What will be your response? What is Christmas? I say, this is Christmas. The eternal word of God, stepping into our world, clothed in humanity, born in a humble stable.

The eternal word of God, stepping into our world, clothed in humanity, born in a humble stable. Jesus didn't come to us, as a king, in a palace, with political power, and authority, but he came, as a baby, in a manger, fully God, and fully man.

And this is what Paul meant, in our text, of 2 Timothy, this morning, chapter 1, verse 10a, when he writes that, and I call him, grace hidden for ages, was revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus.

[14 : 26] God's grace became visible, and tangible, in the person of Jesus Christ. So the birth of Jesus into the world, more than 2,000 years back, is a historical fact.

It is a historical fact, because there are some people, who still say that, that was just a mystery, that was just, as you call it.

In fact, a historical dating system, which I call, a Christ-centered timeline, established based on the time of Jesus' birth, had become, a common framework, for historical dating, across regions, and cultures, ever since.

And we all know the terms, I refer to, that is, what we call, A.D., or in Latin, called, Anno Domini, which means, in the year of the Lord, emphasizing the era, as centered on Christ's birth, and B.C., meaning what?

Before Christ. So the birth of Jesus Christ, is not a fairy tale, it's real. It happened. Yes, Jesus indeed, once, walked upon this earth.

[15 : 51] So church, the act of God, becoming a man, with flesh, and blood, like all of us, is normally called, the incarnation.

It is the ultimate act of love. It's God, stepping into our brokenness, to bring hope, healing, and salvation. You know, other beliefs, do not, teach about, a personal God, like, the God of the Bible.

Other beliefs, their gods, do not want to communicate, directly with his creation. Their God, is very far away, in the heaven, somewhere. And sometimes, when he wants to speak, he is only, a conduit, or a messenger, and he only uses, one particular language, of the world.

Very specialized. So he doesn't understand, Bidayu, he doesn't understand, Iban, he doesn't understand, bawang, penan, kain, kain, kain, but the Christian God, is a God, who came to live, among his people, to understand, and experience, our struggles, and sorrows.

So when Philip, one of, Jesus' disciples, asked Jesus, Lord, so as, the father, referring to God, and Jesus answered, Philip, don't you know me, Philip, even after I've been, among you, such a long time, anyone who has seen me, has seen the father, how can you say, so as the father, don't you believe, that I am in the father, and the father is in me, just imagine, church, a king, leaving, his throne, to live, among his people, not to rule over them, not to torture them, but to save them, from some, calamities, or danger, and this is what, Jesus did for us, he left, the glory of heaven, to live among us, to walk in our shoes, and ultimately, to die, for our sins, and Apostle John, in writing, to the early Christian, to persevere, in their faith, said, in 1 John 1, verses 1 to 3, that which was, from the beginning, he said, which we have heard, which we have seen, with our eyes, which we have looked at, and our hands have touched, this we proclaim, concerning, the word, of life, the life appeared, we have seen it, and testified to it, and we proclaim, to you, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and has appeared, to us, we proclaim, to you, what we have seen, and heard, so that you also, may have fellowship, with us, and our fellowship, is with the Father, and with his Son,

[19 : 01] Jesus Christ, you know, from the legal perspective, as a, a lawyer, this is a very, powerful piece, of primary evidence, we have here, three times, John used the phrase, we have seen it, we have seen it, we have seen him, not only, did the apostle, had heard, about this, Jesus Christ, the word of life, and life itself, but they have seen him, with their own eyes, look at him, and their hand, touch him, and now testify, about him, in the court of law, we call this, primary evidence, we call this, eyewitnesses, that would definitely, be accepted, by the judge, brothers and sisters, let me say it again, the birth of Christ, is God's grace, made visible, tangible, and accessible, to us,

God's grace, was revealed to us, because this God, wants, to have fellowship, with you, and with me, but the question is, are, we ready, to have fellowship, with him, today, church, the story, of God's grace, doesn't end, with a baby, in a manger, praise the Lord, the baby grew up, he lived a sinless life, preached the gospel, of the kingdom, healed the sick, and ultimately, went to the cross, he died, and was buried, and the Bible says, on the third day, Jesus rose, from the dead, which we now call, the resurrection, of Jesus Christ, in his death, and resurrection, Jesus accomplished, what, no one else could, he defeated sin, he defeated death, forever, amen, third point, the victory, of grace, life, and immortality, so, second Timothy, chapter one, verse 10b, which we read earlier on, concluded, and I caught him, 10b, the appearing of our savior,

Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death, and has brought life, and immortality, to light, through the gospel, as Paul says, in one Corinthians, 15:54, to 57, death, death, has been swallowed, up in victory, death, has been swallowed, up in victory, thanks be to God, he give us the victory, through our Lord, Jesus Christ, amen, brothers and sisters, the resurrection, assures believers, those who believe, in God, who those who believe, in Jesus Christ, that death, is not the end, well, many people, believe, that death, is the end, for the Christian, for the believers, death is not the end, but the beginning, of an eternal life, secured, in Jesus Christ, church, my final, submission, this morning, is that, the resurrection, of Jesus Christ, is the litmus test, it is the litmus test, and the cornerstone, of the Christian faith, our faith, our belief, as Christian, will rise, or fall, on whether,

Jesus, rose, from the dead, and that's not, my proposition, okay, and that's, Paul's statement, Apostles Paul said, in 1 Corinthians 15, 14, if Christ, has not been raised, our preaching, is useless, and so, is your faith, and so, is your coming, this morning, for this Christmas service, and so, would be all, the Sunday services, that you attended, all these years, and in the future, it will be useless, if Christ, did not rise, from the dead, but Paul's statement, here, to me, seemed to be, so confident, he's 100% sure, that Jesus, indeed, draws, from the dead, it is our belief, that the resurrection, is, a real, fact, of history, it was, a historical event, rooted, in the eyewitnesses, and testimonies, of the early church, and according, to the tradition, of the church as well, the gospel accounts, and the new testament, writing, consistently present, the resurrection, as, literal, bodily event, that Jesus, rose, in his body form, and rose up, so this morning,

I want to, say with you, for very, compelling reasons, why I believe, and many people believe, and many Christians believe, that the resurrection, is in all probability, that's what the lawyer says, in all probability, was true, and it did happen, why we say this, because we were not there, there, one, the empty tomb, all for gospel, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, agree, that Jesus' tomb, was found, empty, on the third day, the empty tomb, serves as a central, piece of evidence, that the resurrection, was not, a spiritual, or, metaphorical, event, but, a literal, physical one, two, eyewitness testimonies, Paul, in 1 Corinthians, 15, 3 to 8, lists those, who witnessed, the risen Christ, including Peter, the apostle, and over, 500 people, at one time, and these testimonies, were written, during the lifetime, of many, many witnesses, making the claims, verifiable, to early readers, including those, who opposed, the faith then, thirdly, and this to me, is very powerful, the transformation, of the disciples, the transformation, of the disciples, before the resurrection, the disciples, were fearful, and scotered, but after, encountering, the risen Christ, they boldly, proclaimed, his victory, even, at great, personal cost, the dramatic change, in their demeanor, points, to their unwavering, belief, in the reality, of the resurrection, and according, to historical facts, and church tradition, all, the disciples, all the disciples, with the exception, of Judas, died, as a martyrs, the crucial question is, who would die, for a lie, think about it, who would die, for a lie, the doubting Thomas, who eventually, met, the risen Christ, put his hand, at the wound, set his side, touch, the nail pierced, hand, and feet, he went to India, he went to preach, the gospel, and he died, as a martyr, he was impaled, by a spear, when the Brahmins, got angry with him, for going against, the caste system, in India, fourthly, the birth, of the church, the beginning, of the church, the resurrection, ignited, the spread, of Christianity, without it, the movement, would likely, have died, with Jesus, in fact, the early church, proclamation,

[27 : 27] Jesus, is the reason, became, its defining message, at this, at this, church, I want, us to ponder, for a moment, and ask, ourselves, where are, all the founders, of other religions, of the world today, where are they, answer, all died, and were buried, none had risen, from the dead, as Jesus did, so don't tell me, all religion, all belief, are the same, that all religion, will lead to heaven, no, they are not, again, let's reflect, on the saying, of other great religious leaders, that had started, all the great religions, of the world, none, had proclaimed, what they said, they proclaimed, I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes, to the father, except, through me, why, because I believe, they are not, they are not, only Jesus, there to say that, because he is the truth, he is the way, he is the life, so Paul tells us, in our text, again, 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 10b, that through Christ, death, has been destroyed, and immortality, has been brought to light, death, has been destroyed, and immortality, has been brought to life, therefore, therefore,

Christmas, is not just, a celebration, of Christ's birth, but also, a celebration, of his victory, over sin, and death, the birth of Jesus, was the beginning, of the end, for death, and the dawn, of eternal life, for all, who believe, in Paul's words, he said, I caught him, immortality, has been brought, to light, meaning, eternal life, had been proclaimed, to us, or eternal life, is available, to us, because, death, has been destroyed, amen, therefore, the question, for us this morning, is how, shall then, we respond, to this gift, of grace, Jesus Christ, the reason, for his coming, to the world, born, on Christmas day, and the significance, of his death, and his resurrection, because, it is not just, about what happened, more than, 2000 years back, it's about, what it means, for you, and I, today, and for eternity, well, let's start, with the resurrection, for us, who are believers,

I would like to propose, five areas, of our life, where resurrection, can be of great value, and relevance, first, we have hope, in eternal life, the resurrection, assures believers, of our own resurrection, Jesus victory, over death, means that death, no longer has the final word, this hope, is especially powerful, in the face, of suffering, persecution, sicknesses, or loss, as seen in, 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 13 to 18, but if, you are, not a believer, then there is no hope, of life, after death, secondly, resurrection empowerment, for holy living, the resurrection, empowers Christian, to live a transformed life, it has the power, to transform our life, Romans 6, 4, Paul explained, that just as Christ, was raised from the dead, believers are called, to walk, in the newness, of life, the same power, that raised Jesus, at work, in believers, through the Holy Spirit, if he's in one, 1920, thirdly, boldness, in witness, disciple, transformation, from fear, to boldness, serve as a model, for Christian today, the resurrection, emboldens believers, to share the gospel, knowing that their faith, is anchored, in a living savior, fourthly, assurance, of God's faithfulness, the resurrection, reminds Christian, that God, keeps his promises, if he raised,

Jesus from the dead, he will fulfill, all other promises, including, the promise, to return, and establish, his kingdom, where we to be, with him, forever, and a call, to worship, the resurrection, is celebrated, weekly, on Sunday, so I, we call it, the Lord's Day, and annually, at Easter, it compels, us, as Christian, to worship, Jesus, as the risen king, whose reign, is eternal, finally, to wrap it all, Paul, in the opening, of our next, of our text, this morning, urges us all, who had been redeemed, by the grace, of all Jesus Christ, to consecrate, or dedicate, our lives to him, verse 9, Paul said, and I caught him, he has saved us, and called us, to a holy life, he has saved us, and called us, to a holy life, holy life, is not a sinless life, but, it is, our desire, an effort, now, while living, on the side of eternity, to be set apart, for God, and living, in a way, that reflects,

God's character, purpose, and God's standards, it involves, an inward, transformation, and outward action, what is inside, is reflected, in our action, outside, but for those of you, who are seeking, the truth, or perhaps, seeking the true God, even wondering, if Jesus is who, he claims to be, the way, the truth, and life, well, you have heard, my sermon this morning, and I want to say this, this Christmas morning, Jesus, offers you, the greatest gift, the gift of grace, free, himself, will you receive him, and experience, the eternal life, he brings, unlike, my nephew,

[34 : 29] Charles, who sent us, all the way, to the front, of our farm gate, Jesus, promised you, that if you, accept him, as your Lord, and Savior, he will lead you, all the way, through this life, and life, after, into the gate, of heaven, to be with him, forever, because, because, in the gospel, John, Jesus said, I am the gate, whoever, enters through me, will be saved, as a bow, our heads, in prayer, I'll pray for us, heavenly father, we thank you, for the gift, of grace, revealed, in Christ Jesus, from the beginning, you had, you had, planned, to save us, and at Christmas, you brought, that plan, to life, to the birth, of your son, Jesus Christ, Lord, we marvel, at your love, a love, so deep, that you became, flesh, and dwelt among us, bringing light, to our, our darkness, and life, to our death, as you celebrate, this season, help us, to reflect, on the purpose, of your coming, to embrace, the life, and immortality, you offer, to the gospel, and to share, this good news, with others, for those, seeking hope, this Christmas,

Lord, may they see, Jesus is the answer, to their every deed, let this be, the season, they open their hearts, to receive, the greatest gifts, of all, your saving grace, if there is, any among us, this morning, who would love, to accept, this gift of grace, from God, Jesus himself, please follow me, in this prayer, just follow me, as I, I make this prayer, if that is the desire, of your hearts, this morning, heavenly father, I thank you, for sending, Jesus Christ, into the world, to die, for my sins, so that I can, have eternal life, in heaven, thank you Lord, Jesus, for willingly, dying on the cross, so that the plan, of salvation, could be achieved, and made available, to whoever, wants to accept, Jesus Christ, as their Lord, and Savior, now,

I want to surrender, my life, into your hands, and accept, and accept, the fact, that you died, on the cross, for my sins, please forgive me, for all my sins, and now, I invite you, into my life, to be my Lord, Savior, and King, Amen.

Amen.