



## **CHRISTMAS DAY (2016) - Christmas Bells**

**Introduction - The Christmas story of the birth of Christ is always a compelling story, because it is the story of the incarnation — that the God of the universe became one of us, that the Second Person of the Triune God took on flesh and blood. Now, maybe some of you hear that and you roll your eyes.**

**But what stories about life and the universe have you heard and believed? And in hearing them myself... I am convinced that keeping both my feet firmly planted in the story of the incarnation is not only wise but ultimately more believable.**

Let me state some alternative stories of the world crudely and simply.

First, the universe has just always existed. (That in itself takes more faith than the incarnation.)

Even more problematic is the belief that the universe just somehow appeared out of nothing. No explanation as to where the matter came from just that it, well, poof... the universe is magic.

Now, in both these scenarios the universe is just there and the conditions on the earth are just so that life develops, conveniently enough, on its own.

Then we develop language and communities and stories to help us cope with this mystery that is the universe, which means the stories are ultimately meaningless. Because if we all came from nowhere then there is nowhere to go. From nothing nothing comes. So, if we came from nothing then we return to nothing.

Now, I know these views can be stated with more sophistication, but is that not the gist of them? That's the point I'm making, because

some of you state the Christian story with as much ignorance and crudeness.

There was a saying Jesus often used after He taught the crowds. He would say —

## **Matthew 11:15**

15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

This meant, if the teachings of Jesus made sense to those who heard them, they had ears to hear. If what Jesus said didn't make sense, they didn't have ears to hear, spiritually speaking.

The Bible itself teaches that for someone to read it and understand it they must first be born again. You have to have a spiritual birth to have spiritual ears.

It's the same today. The message of the incarnation, of God becoming one of us, is for those who have ears to hear. For some of you this will make complete sense. For others, you're more likely to believe in UFOs than in all the evidence for the historicity of the nativity.

**Some of you are like the adults in the movie *The Polar Express*. You believe yourself too sophisticated for something like the incarnation. You shake the bell and say, “Oh, too bad it’s broken.”**

**When the Apostle Peter preached, he said “Men of Israel, hear these words...” Stephan, before he was martyred, began his message with: “Brothers and fathers, hear me.”**

**Luke tells us that when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.”**

**And others believed what they heard.**

**So, some mocked, some needed more information and some believed. Today, you’re in one of those categories.**

**Now, the first group couldn’t hear the good news. The bell was broken as far as they were concerned. They are like the people described in Matthew’s Gospel.**

## **Matthew 13:15**

15 For this people's heart has grown dull,

and with their ears they can barely hear,  
and their eyes they have closed,  
lest they should see with their eyes  
and hear with their ears  
and understand with their heart  
and turn, and I would heal them.’

**This group has closed their eyes and ears. There is a willful ignorance involved, otherwise they might see and hear and turn and be healed.**

**If you’re in this category, ask yourself, “What is it you do not like about the story of the gospel?” And the answer to that question (if you answer it honestly) will tell you why you don’t want to hear. It will tell you what you’re actually afraid of... regarding the truth of this claim. Because it often comes down to — “If it’s true, this is what frightens me about it.”**

**And it’s not an issue of evidence.**

## **Luke 16:31**

31 He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

**Dig deeper. There’s something else holding you back, other than evidence.**

Three times the writer of the book of Hebrews says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

So, this morning I am going to ask you three questions about what you hear.

1. What do you hear about the world? And when you hear it, what do you believe about it? Did you hear this last week about the parents who used their seven-year old daughter as a suicide bomber? They strapped a bomb to her, sent her into a police station in Syrian and then triggered it remotely. When I heard that it told me that what you believe matters. But not only what you believe, what others believe matters. Because what you believe effects your actions.

And let me be clear about something, unbelief is a belief. Unbelief is not a neutral place, as if unbelief doesn't have implications that effect the world and your actions in it.

What I hear about the world when I hear reports like this is that the world is broken.

2. What do you hear about yourself?

## Mark 7:14-15

14 And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: 15 There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”

In other words, human behavior is not environmental, but internal. It's not your bad diet that causes your bad behavior. It's not your bad environment that causes your bad behavior. What causes your bad behavior is that you're broken. Something inside has defiled human nature. The world is broken because humanity is broken. Your bad behavior comes from your bad heart.

That's why we can't hear the bell. We do not have spiritual ears. Our spiritual eardrum is broken.

3. What do hear about the solution?

Because every philosophy, every religion, every worldview is about this problem — how do we fix things?

That's the good news of the incarnation.

## Matthew 20:28

28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**Jesus was born to give His life for you on the cross. He took the entire record of your bad behavior and washed it away with His blood on the cross.**

**This is what the birth of Christ is about. This is what the incarnation is about.**

## John 3:16-17

16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

**And this opens the way for you to receive a new heart, to receive the Holy Spirit who opens yours ears to hear the bell.**

## Titus 3:5

5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

## John 7:39

39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive,

**What’s it take to receive the Spirit? Believing the message of the cross.**

## Luke 1:44-45

44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

**When you hear this message, do you believe it? Do you believe what was spoken to you from the Lord? That if you believe in Christ, in His life, death and resurrection, that you will be saved from the penalty of your own bad record? That you’ll be given the Holy Spirit? That you’ll go from spiritual death to spiritual life?**

## John 5:25

25 “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

**We're spiritually dead before we hear this good news about Christ. When we hear it and believe it, we pass from death to life.**

**And this is why Christians continue to share this message with everyone who is open to it. Because what you believe in your heart makes it way out of your mouth.**

## **Romans 10:9**

**9** because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

**If you hear and believe, be encouraged.**

## **John 8:47**

**47** Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

**The church is here so that people might hear. The church is here to ring the bells of this good news.**

- **2012 Olympics**

**Bells ring out the changes of our days. They call us to wake, to pray, to work, to arms, to feast and, in times of crisis, to come together.**

**Above all, bells are the sound of freedom and peace. Throughout World War II all of Britain's bell towers were stilled, to be rung only in case of emergency. They hung in dusty silence until the day came when they could ring in the peace.**

**The story of the incarnation is that now we can have peace with God because of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

## **Matthew 10:27**

**27** What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.

**Today, we end our service with some symbolic bell ringing. As the ushers pass the basket, everyone take a bell, but as tempting as it is right now, do not ring your bell yet. Wait. Do not ring your bell yet.**

**We'll ring them in the fashion of the candle light service where each person lights the next person's candle. Here's how it will go. We'll start with the very back corner row. You**

**ring your bells twice. That's the cue for the person next to your to start their bell.**

**This is our reminder of why Christ was born on Christmas Day. The church is here so that people might hear.**

**Merry Christmas!**