

Christmas Day 2024, 9.30am

To you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

Saviour. Think about that word. What does it mean for Jesus to be the Saviour?

Here's what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that because of Jesus, when we die we are all going to go to Heaven. That's true, of course, but it's not what the Bible means by salvation, or at best it is a small, pale version of what the Bible means.

It also doesn't mean that because of Jesus, you can be forgiven all the bad things you have done. That's also true, but it's not what the Bible means by salvation. At best, it's a small pale version of what the Bible means.

For much of the Old Testament and the Jews of Jesus' day, it was very clear what salvation meant. Salvation meant kicking the Romans out. It meant God's people being free to live in God's land in God's way – in peace and justice and righteousness. It meant things being right, right at every level from the big political things to the small personal things. It meant life lived as God meant it. You tell a bunch of first century Jewish shepherds that the Saviour is born, and that is what they see coming.

The story of the New Testament is about seeing that hope grow even bigger. The New Testament sees that it is not just the Romans that are the problem, and not even just the wicked Jews – the Herods, the priests – who help them. The wrongness of the world goes much deeper than that, it goes down into every single human heart, and it has got everything in its grip. Sin and Death: moral and physical ruin. That's the problem. It's not enough just to kick out the Romans. To heal this ruin, you would need to start all over again.

And that's what Jesus is. The world starts over again. As the old hymn puts it: 'O loving wisdom of our God! When all was sin and shame/ a second Adam to the fight, and to the rescue came.' The second Adam. You don't have to believe there was actually a real, historical first one to get the point – what happens in Jesus is that somehow, creation gets to start again. And this time, rather than greed and violence and fear beginning to flow through everything, this time, Jesus flows. This time, love, and justice, and peace, begin to touch everything and to turn everything around.

That is what salvation means. A world which was doomed, which was trapped in ruin and misery, that world has been touched. That world has a new energy put inside it, an energy which has the capacity to take even the coldest, deadest parts of our ruin and make them new, make them good. There is simply nothing, now, which cannot be touched and healed. Not one single thing, not one single person, that cannot be as God first meant it.

Now that is one very bold claim. Think of all the victims of history, and worse think of those who made them victims.

Think of the bullies, the thugs, the killers. Think of the abusers. And then try saying, there is not one single person who must be lost. Not one single person who cannot be turned round and healed.

Think of our whole sorry world, with all its pain and guilt, with its great heaps of broken bodies, and then try saying that the whole can come alive with joy. That the whole can be shot through with justice, and love, and peace. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ can *all* be made alive.

That, my friends, is what salvation means. That's what it means to have a Saviour born to you. It is way more hard to believe in than anything else we say in church. But it is the very, very heart of the Gospel. It is why the angels burst into songs of joy. It is why we are still here celebrating that night two thousand years later. It's why we can wish each other a truly happy Christmas.