

This is a time of waiting – we’re six days away from Christmas Day when, as Christians, we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Children - and adults - will be waiting with eager anticipation for gifts. That reminds me of a little joke – ‘I once bought my kids a set of batteries for Christmas with a note on it. It said ‘Toys not included’. Why do I find that funny every time?

But seriously, Christmas gifts are given with love from family and friends. And everyone knows they’ll get gifts, they know why they’re coming and are excited about it but what they’re waiting for is something temporal, something material, that’s only going to be of use for a short time, it can’t save them from anything and it is unlikely to last forever.

So what are we waiting for during this season leading up to Christmas Day? Gifts? Seeing family? Lots of food and drink? Or something a little more meaty – the gift of something that will last more than a lifetime, past death and into eternity?

Dan last week focussed on what we’re waiting for, why it’s worth waiting and how we should wait. I want to focus for a short time on WHO we’re waiting for.

Let’s go back to the time of the birth of Jesus. The Jews were waiting for someone. As a people they’d been waiting for hundreds of years – they were oppressed and ruled by the Romans and they knew from their historical prophecies that they were waiting for someone who would save them, who would rescue them. They thought they knew who they were expecting. But they were only focussed on the situation they were in – it was a temporal thing they wanted saving from, they weren’t thinking about their standing before God, only their need right now. Some stopped waiting and tried to take it into their own hands and start a revolt against their oppressors.

Their Creator God seemed far away, up there in the heavens, not on earth and therefore, in their minds, of no help at all. They’d forgotten why they were waiting for rescue, why they were living – Dan described it last week as ‘inherently selfish’, caring more about themselves than God’s will. They were separated from a holy God by their inability to keep His law. We’re no different, we’re all born into this same situation, unable to stand before God because we are all unable to keep God’s holy law.

I wonder if we feel a bit like the Jews did sometimes in our own lives. We're in a situation where we're oppressed and overwhelmed and we are waiting for someone to come along and get us out of it. Or we try and sort it all out ourselves. And we forget what we're waiting for or who's kingdom we're living in, just as they did. Our God seems very far away. I wonder if sometimes, like the Jews at that time, whether we think we know what or who we're expecting and that maybe, we should be waiting and watching for something completely different.

But there some who were waiting in anticipation, who knew what they were waiting for and why. Simeon was one. Let's read his story from Luke 2:24-32

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

*²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."*

Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel – he had listened to the guiding of the Holy Spirit. He was not watching and waiting for something for himself but for God's promise of a Saviour to be fulfilled in His life.

There was Anna too, who had been fasting and praying for a long time, living in the temple, waiting and now she 'gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem'.

They weren't the only ones waiting for the promise of a Saviour to be fulfilled. Think of Mary, engaged to Joseph and then this happened:
Luke 1:27

God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary. ²⁸ He said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words but the angel said "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."

And there was Elizabeth, Mary's cousin who was the mother of John the Baptist, who believed what God had told her and was waiting and watching to see His promises fulfilled in her life.

Luke 1:39

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

These four people knew who they were waiting for and why. They knew that they needed a Saviour to come down, a gift from God to reign in His Kingdom. I wonder what we are waiting for in our lives and for whom.

Are we waiting for love to come down in an earthly way? We all want love, don't we? Our hearts long for love, that's how we are made, to live in community, to love and care for others, and to be loved ourselves. The best gift we can give anyone is love. But because we are sinners, as far as human love is concerned, and as wonderful as it can be sometimes, in the end it is tainted by our own selfish desires and sin. It can only at best be a shadow of the love that God has for His people and His creation because only He is perfect Love.

But through the birth, life, death and resurrection of God's Son we can have the one thing that makes us whole, we can have the love of God in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

And what Father God has done, to show His love for the world, even in the face of the Fall and man's inherent sin, is to send us His love, His flesh and blood, His only Son, as a baby, as a human being, fully man but also fully God, someone who can take our place, take our punishment, and have victory over our sin. There's that wonderful verse that we all know in John 3:16.

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Love comes down.

So where are we in this season where we celebrate the birth of Jesus? Are we waiting to meet Jesus, Son of God and Saviour of the World? Are we looking for Him, watching for Him, wanting to get to know Him more, to hear His voice in our hearts, to live for Him?

Or are we waiting for something or someone to turn up in our lives in the hope that our lives will be better – how often have I heard myself and others say 'Well, I hope next years better than this one'.

I wasn't going to add this point but I woke in the night thinking about it so I will just mention it. This doesn't just apply to us individually, this is about us as a church, us here as a body at PBC. What are we waiting for here? Are we waiting for God's way and willing to watch for His promise? Or are we waiting for what we want, what we expect?

Have we got our hearts set on treasures in heaven or on earth? Next year might not be better in a worldly sense than this one, but if we're living for the Lord Jesus, our Saviour and King, then it most definitely will be. Just as an aside here, the new PBC sermon series for 2011 is all about living in Jesus and Colin Burgess will start the series on 2nd January with a re-commitment to 'knowing Jesus'. What a great start that will be to the New Year.

To wrap this up, I want to pick up where Dan left off last week about how we wait - Dan asked if we wait passively or actively? He gave the great example of someone coming and clearing away the snow from outside the door to enable others to come into the church and hear God's voice. It was an active piece of work and furthered God's

kingdom by allowing people access to the church last week. We need that sort of active waiting work this afternoon as the three Carols by Candlelight services take place, and we need to welcome, clear up and serve refreshments to those who come in to praise the coming of Jesus.

Anyway, I had been thinking further along those lines and specifically looking at how those waited, who we read of, who were looking for the promises of God to be fulfilled in their lives, the promise that they would meet Jesus. What did they do? They watched and prayed and praised.

That's exactly what we need to do, to know what this 'Love Come Down' is – we need to watch and pray for God's promises to be fulfilled, pray to know Him more through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, worship this Jesus, our Saviour – then we'll know what real Love is, grow in ourselves and in furthering the Kingdom of God here and in heaven.

I'll close with the verse from 1 John 4:9

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Amen