

People talk about the love, hope, peace and joy of Christmas. But for many this is superficial, short-lived or non-existent. That's because many want Christmas without Christ. They want to celebrate Jesus' birth without acknowledging his death for them. They want family celebrations without the presence of the true Father. This kind of approach makes Christmas superficial, [Slide 1] because the best thing about Christmas is Jesus. He is the only one who can give true love, joy, hope and peace.

Over the years, I've been using my [Super Dude] Detective skills and discovered the following: [Slide 2]

- Babies can be born – that is a medical fact.
- A baby named Jesus was born to Mary – well, that's a piece of history.
- Baby Jesus was born **for you** and me. - That's the point of [tonight's/last night's] drama, and that's the good news of the Gospel! This is the beginning of true hope, love, peace and joy.

But by itself, this statement doesn't make sense. So tonight I want to briefly explain what is so good about this particular baby. What does it mean that he was born for you and me? And how is this the beginning of true hope?

[Slide 3] Well, every baby is special. Every baby changes things. But this one is particularly special, because Jesus is God in the flesh. Baby Jesus is God with eyebrows and a cute button nose. Baby Jesus is God, vulnerable, crying and pooping his nappy. A few years later, Jesus grows up to be God with knobbly knees, zits, and being picked on at school.

Jesus is God become one of us. But what's especially important is what this baby later does for you and me. [Slide 4] This baby grew up to die on a cross. Christmas is only important because of Easter – So tonight I've brought an Easter Egg to remind us of

this. The best thing about Easter is also Jesus. Over time, I've also been able to use my expert Detective skills to discover: [Slide 5]

- Jesus died – that's a medical fact.
- Jesus died on a cross and was placed in a tomb – that's a piece of solid, well-documented history.
- Jesus died **for you** and me. Now that's the good news of the Gospel!

Why is that good news? Why is this important?

Well, the devil wants us to believe our good works are good enough. He wants us to believe that all the people that we consider 'good enough', will go to heaven.

But that's not how it works. That's not the rules the bible lays down. As Paul says to young pastor Timothy, [Slide 6]

anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules.
(2 Timothy 2:5, NIV)

The rule book says we need to be perfect to be part of God's kingdom. That's because the Kingdom of Heaven is perfect, so only perfect people are allowed in.

We might think we are good, but we know we are not perfect. Since none of us are perfect, then according to the rules, none of us deserve a place in heaven.

Because of our imperfection and sin, we are all destined for hell. A horrible, tortuous place where none of us want to end up!

How can we possibly obtain the victor's crown that Paul speaks of? The only way for us to have hope of a destiny other than hell, is for someone perfect to take our place. Thankfully, that's exactly what happens on the cross. [Slide 7] Our imperfection is exchanged for Christ's perfection. He takes our sin, and gives us his robe of

righteousness. We are made perfect only through Jesus Christ. It's only by trusting in him, rather than trusting in our good works, that we can have eternal life and a place in the kingdom of heaven.

Because God loves you and me so much, he provided a way for us to become perfect in Jesus, and be a part of the kingdom of Heaven.

When we are baptised we are joined to Jesus Christ. Our sin is washed away and we are given his robe of righteousness. In baptism we are also given faith to trust in Jesus and be saved.

[Slide 8]

“This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again.” (John 3:16-17, THE MESSAGE)

How do we know this is true? How do we know he wasn't just an ordinary baby who died like any ordinary person? [Well it's time for you to use your Super Dude Detective skills and see what conclusion you make.]

Three days after his death, [Slide 9]

- Jesus' body was missing. That's an historical fact. But when look at the evidence what conclusion do we come to?
- The disciples say they saw him eating a piece of fish. Ghosts don't eat food - that's a medical fact.
- The women at the tomb, the disciples and many others saw him alive. That's a miracle. And the Good news of hope for you and me.

That baby Jesus was born for you is good news, only because he later died for you and rose to life again for you. He did all this because he loves you. He did this so that we could be spared from the fate of hell and eternal death that we deserve. He did this so that we could be forgiven, made perfect in Christ and have eternal life. Christmas is only precious because of the treasure of Easter [Easter Egg].

[Slide 10] Jesus is the best thing about Christmas. Trying to celebrate without focussing on him, his birth, his death and his resurrection, means our joy will be short-lived and shallow – if we have joy at all. It's only the hope and joy of Easter that brings true hope and joy to you and me at Christmas.

May Christ be a significant part of our celebrations this Christmas, and every Christmas. May the one true and loving Father be acknowledged at our family gatherings. And may the joy and peace from having our sins forgiven last all through the new year and until the end of our life here on earth.

Jesus Christ was born for you, lived a perfect life on your behalf, died for you and has risen again for you. Let us celebrate this. Amen.