

Hey everyone. Welcome to Valley Creek Online and Merry Christmas. My name is Trip and I get to serve as the Online Campus Pastor here. And wherever you are in the world, I want you to know that hope is here, everyone is welcome and Jesus changes everything. So if this is your first time with us, maybe somebody invited you to check this out or if you're with us every week, this is your campus, or maybe you're sitting in somebody's house and they've turned this on, we are so glad to be celebrating Christmas with you. And hey, during our time together we're going to be lighting Christmas candles as part of our experience. So if you're part of the online campus and we sent you those, go ahead and get them out, get them ready. And if you didn't get candles from us, that's okay, you can just push pause right now, go get whatever candles you have so you can be part of this experience with us. But I want to encourage you, go ahead and let's set the atmosphere. Whatever space you're in, maybe dim the lights, let's go ahead and leave the Christmas tree on, but let's settle in, remove distractions and get ready to have an experience together.

See, we want to help you today not just hear the Christmas story, but to have an experience with the Christmas story. So let's invite the Holy Spirit in. Holy Spirit, we just invite you into our spaces, and in this time, will you come and show us who Jesus is and why he came for us?

In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was a life and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

He is before all things and in him all things hold together. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now, the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God said, "Let dry ground appear. Let the land produce vegetation, let the waters team with living creatures and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky. Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds." And it was so. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, and over the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." God saw all that he had made and it was very good. Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east in Eden and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and

the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You're free to eat from any tree in the garden but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for when you eat of it, you will surely die."

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals that the Lord God had made he said to the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat from the fruit of the trees in the garden but God did say, 'you must not eat from the fruit of the tree that's in the middle of the garden and you must not touch it or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be open and you'll be like God knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food, was pleasing to the eye and desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and she ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate it and the eyes of both of them were opened and they realized they were naked.

So they sewed fig leaves together and they made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals. You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust for all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers and he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." To Adam he said, "Because you ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you.

Through painful toil, you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground. Since from it you were taken, for dust you are, and to dust you will return. So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. Through the disobedience of one man, Adam, the many were made sinners. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. 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. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

When the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law to redeem those under law that we might receive the full rights of sons. God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee to a virgin pledge to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings. You are highly favored. The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his

words and wondered what kind of a greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus."

"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 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you, so the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God for nothing is impossible with God." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph.

But before they came together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man, he did not want to expose her to public disgrace. He had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel, which means God with us."

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him. And he took Mary home as his wife, but he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. What then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things? For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, neither height nor death nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. And everyone went up to his own town to register, so Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David because he belonged to the house and the line of David. He went there to register with Mary who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. And while they were there, the time came for the baby to be born. And she gave birth to her firstborn a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. The word became flesh and made his dwelling

among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.

For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God, something to be grasped, but made himself nothing taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not. For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given. And the government will be on his shoulders and he will be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. Look, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the lord shone around them and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today, in the town of David a savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You'll find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of heavenly host appeared with the angel praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rest."

When the angel had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. And when they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told to them about this child. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds had said to them. The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem. "Where is this one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." They went on their way and the star that they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshipped him. They opened up their treasures and they presented him with gifts of gold, and of incense, and of myrrh. 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. This is love, not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men. He was about 30 years old when he began his ministry. When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too.

And as he was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my son whom I love. With you, I am well pleased." From that time on, Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. For the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Today, salvation has come for the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.

And he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil because God was with him. And the people were amazed at his teaching because he taught them as one who had authority. He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies. I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. For this reason I was born and for this I came into the world.

Listen to this, Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs which God did among you through him. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge and you with the help of wicked men put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. And he was buried and he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. So death has been swallowed up in victory. Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law but thanks be to God, he gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

For if by the trespass of the one man, Adam, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ? He said, "I am the first and the last. I am the living one. I was dead and behold I am alive forever and ever and I am making everything new." He is the Lord of lords and King of kings. Then. Then he opened their minds so they

could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written. The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all the nations."

For in the time of my favor I heard you. And in the day of salvation I helped you. I tell you, now is the time of God's favor. Now is the day of salvation. I will be a father to you and you will be my sons and daughters. So repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children, for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world."

"Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble but take heart I have overcome the world." All these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever believes in me will never walk in darkness." Jesus, the light of the world, came to turn on the lights inside our hearts. So at the count of three, we're going to blow out our candles. One, two, three. See, that was the whole story of Christmas according to only Scripture.

Literally, every word you just heard, word for word, was Scripture, 154 verses from Genesis to Revelation telling us about Jesus, the light of the world, the one that came that we would never walk in darkness again. But why is this good news of great joy? We see God created the world but man lost it in the garden so God sent Jesus to restore our identity, to reconcile our relationship, to redeem our purpose so that we would never have to walk in darkness again. So maybe you've never heard it or maybe you forgot. Can I just ask you, would you close your eyes with me for just a moment? And maybe you could pray something like this if you want to receive Jesus for the first time, if you forgot and want to really return back to him, if you just maybe want to praise him today. Just say, thank you Jesus that you came. You came for me, you came to turn on a light back into my heart. Today, I receive you as Lord of my life. I receive your forgiveness, I receive your life and I want your story to become my story, in Jesus' name, amen.

We are so glad that you are here with us today to experience the whole story of Christmas. Hey, who is one person that you could share this with? Maybe you could put a link to it on your social media or send it to somebody and invite them to watch too. If you need prayer for anything or if you're new here and you'd like to connect with us, we want to connect with you too. All you have to do is text "Online" to 55888 to start that conversation.

"The Whole Story of Christmas" | December 23, 2021

Pastor Becca Reynolds, Pastor Ben Moreno, Pastor Jason Hillier, Pastor Justin Nall, Pastor John Stickl

And hey, if you've come ready to give, you can give online at valleycreek.org or your end of year giving same place, but we believe that giving is just a response to the goodness of God in our lives. But as you go, I pray that you would go knowing that God is good, that Jesus has forgiven you, that you are loved and that everything is possible. Merry Christmas.