

Hi everyone, my name is Mark and I am one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance; it's wonderful to have you with us this afternoon/tonight. And I trust that in some small way, we can play a part in blessing you this Christmas season.

This afternoon/tonight, I want to talk with you about the intersection between Jesus, Christmas, and hope. You know...hope seems like such a small thing...until it's gone. Have you ever tried living without hope? When life is disappointing, or confusing, or painful, hope is that bright light that pierces the darkness. How do we live with without hope? We don't...not really. Without hope we wither, we languish, we fade away.

There is a lot of hope that floats around at Christmas. Some of us hope it will snow, we hope that our family gets along, and we hope our parents bought the presents we asked for. But hope goes much deeper than that, doesn't it? Some of us are hoping for that Christmas bonus. Others are hoping that the New Year will mean a fresh start: perhaps a new job, a new relationship, a reconciled family, or maybe we're just hoping for a newer, fitter, happier version of ourselves.

One thing I know...we are hopeless without hope. But even in the darkest circumstances, the human heart holds on to hope, daring to believe that there is something more, something better, something waiting for us. God has hard-wired hope into humanity, and behind all of our needs, wants, and desires, Jesus is the more, He's the better, we're hoping for.

At Christmas time we celebrate the mystery of God becoming one of us, taking on our flesh and blood and being born as a little baby. In John 1 we read that Jesus "became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. **18** No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, [Jesus] who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us."<sup>1</sup>

At Christmas we celebrate the arrival of Jesus, and the purpose for which He came. No one expected God to take on human flesh. No one expected that a baby, born to joe-average parents, would be God's plan to redeem and restore the world.

If we are honest, whether we look inward or outward, we are forced to admit that things aren't the way we want them to be. Brokenness abounds...broken bodies, broken dreams and desires, broken families, broken economic systems, and broken nations. "*It shouldn't be this way,*" we tell ourselves. We find ourselves hoping for something more, for something better.

Hope...is it just wishful thinking or does this longing point to who we are, to what we've been made for, and to the One who has made us? I'm convinced that the hope that rises within us is a whisper that points to Jesus, to His life, to His promise to be with us, to restore us, to save us and to sustain us till the very end.

Hope tells us that there is something more, something better; Jesus came to reveal that God Himself is this more and better. Jesus came

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:14,18, *New Living Translation*.

to restore hope, by working to restore all that has been broken in us and in our world. Jesus came to demonstrate the length and breadth, the height and the depth of God's love for us, and for His world.

Jesus came to heal, to teach, to forgive, and ultimately, through His death and resurrection, to make a way for broken, sinful people to come into relationship with a God who invites us to call Him *Father*.

Over 2000 years ago, the angels sang about *Good News of great joy for all people*...and all these years later, it is still the best news going: God loves you and invites you to live your life with Him at the centre. I have to be honest with you...life with Jesus isn't all sandy beaches and Pina Coladas, but it is a full life, a significant life, a satisfying life, that is marked by joy, peace, and hope...no matter how dark the night.

Friends...the peace that you long for, the joy that you're seeking, the significance that you crave...all of these stem from the more and better that is found in Jesus Christ.

**Illus:** My wife Naomi is a nurse at Lions Gate Hospital, here on the North Shore. She works in the Intensive Care Unit, where patients are as ill as they can possibly be. When she tells people where she works, she often jokes, "*I hope I never see you on my floor,*" if she does, it will mean that you're body is failing terribly.

Last week Naomi went to work and was talking with one of her nurse friends who was just getting off her shift. This nurse, like Naomi, is a follower of Jesus; she's found that Jesus is the more and the better she always longed for.

Well...Naomi's friend said, "*You're not going to believe what happened last night...the doctors and the respiratory therapists are still talking about it!*"

She went on to tell the story of a patient who had been rushed into the hospital the night before. This patient was an 89 year old woman...her health was in rapid decline...she was dying. Her breathing was ragged, her heart was in distress, she was beginning to crash and so the doctors, nurses, and RT's were about to ramp up the life saving measures: a breathing tube, drugs, the defibrillator.

But before they could begin, in no uncertain terms, this 89 year old woman said, "*Stop! I'm done! I'm going to see Jesus, do you know Him? He's my King of Kings and Lord of Lords...I'm ready to die!*" Silence and confusion filled the room...the doctors didn't know what to do, or say. But they did honour her request...they stopped, waited, and a few minutes later this woman died.

"*Stop. I'm done. I'm going to see Jesus...I'm ready to die.*" Wishful thinking? No...that was hope speaking...a hope that had been forged through years of experiencing the more and the better that is Jesus Christ. Jesus came to forgive, to heal, and to restore...this life is the first chapter, and the life to come is the the rest of the book...a book without end.

John 1:12-13 says, “*But to all who believed [Jesus]... and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. [And] They are reborn...[with] a birth that comes from God.*”<sup>2</sup>

Friends, in this Christmas season, do not ignore the hope for the more and better that rises within you. And do not be confused about where these whispers are coming from, or what can satisfy them: *Jesus is both the source and the satisfaction.*

The hope that rises within us is a whisper that points to Jesus, to His life, to His promise to be with us, to restore us, to save us, and sustain us till the very end. Make Him your hope this Christmas and find in Him what your heart is longing for.

### **Pray**

### **Worship**

**Benediction:** May the hope of Jesus Christ, fill you afresh this Christmas Season.

In a moment we are going to send you out with a final video, but before we do, I wanted to mention a few things:

- (1) First, I wanted to let you know that you are always welcome to join us...you don't have to wait for next Christmas Eve...there is a place for you here...we'd love to walk with you.

- (2) Second, I want to make you aware that we have set up a donations box in our foyer in partnership with the Harvest Project. The Harvest Project is a non-profit agency on the North Shore that helps people who are trapped in the poverty cycle. If you would like to contribute I know your gift would make a significant difference in people's lives, and;

- (3) Third, as you make your way out tonight, could you please hand your candles to the ushers? Kids...you can keep your glow sticks.

Merry Christmas everyone!

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<sup>2</sup> John 1:12-13, *New Living Translation.*