

God's Great Rescue Plan

Matthew 1:18-25 - NCBC, December 24, 2021

Main Point: **Jesus was born to rescue you from your sins.**

- God's Rescue Plan Conceived (Matthew 1:18)
 - Eternally God's Idea
 - Entirely God's Doing
- God's Rescue Plan Threatened (Matthew 1:19)
 - Human logic can't explain
 - Human pride can't esteem
- God's Rescue Plan Explained (Matthew 1:20-21)
 - God Himself becomes a man
 - God Himself delivers from sin
- God's Rescue Plan Fulfilled (Matthew 1:22-23)
 - Fulfilling the prophets' words
 - Fulfilling the prophets' longings
- God's Rescue Plan Embraced (Matthew 1:24-25)
 - Believing God's Words
 - Obeying God's Words

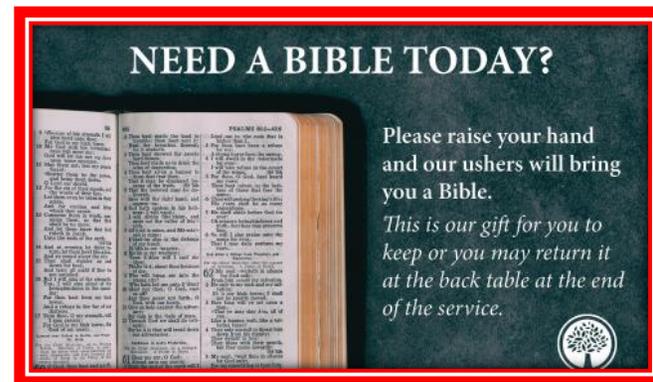
Application: **Believe in Jesus and rejoice in God's rescue of you!**

Opening Announcements:

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O come, let us adore Him now as we open our Bibles to the record of Jesus' birth in **Matthew chapter 1**.



If you don't have a Bible with you, simply raise your hand and we'd be delighted to give you one. It is such a joy to be able to read and meditate upon the wonderful account of Jesus' birth in our Christmas eve worship together this afternoon.



Tonight we want to just quiet our hearts, take a deep breath, turn down all the noise from this world, and refresh our faith by drinking deeply from the familiar account of the birth of Jesus found in **Matthew chapter 1**. To help us all give our full attention to the reading of God's Word, please stand quietly as I read **Matthew 1:18-25** from the **English Standard Translation**.

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his

wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

This is God's historical record of the first Christmas. You may be seated.

Let's Pray.

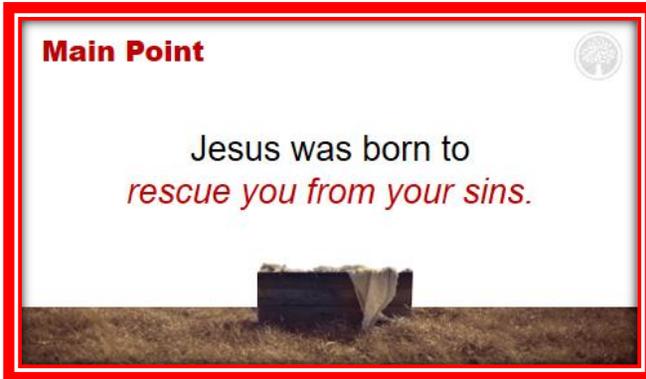
Have you ever been part of a rescue operation? Maybe you've helped rescue someone who was drowning, or maybe you've helped search for someone who was lost? Some of you may even serve as EMTs or rescue personnel for our local emergency response departments.

These are heart-pounding and gut-wrenching experiences aren't they? If you've ever been part of any serious rescue operation you know it is all-hands on deck. Real rescue attempts are urgent, highly emotional, and often messy. Those who are working feverishly to save someone's life don't care about how they look in that moment; they don't care about what others think of them. Instead the focus is singularly on getting our loved one out of danger and into safe and sound care. After all, most often someone's life depends on the success of the rescue operation. That's why it's called a "rescue."

So as we enjoy this hour of worship together on Christmas Eve, we must not allow the tender nostalgia of our traditions to dull our senses. Christmas is most fundamentally about God's great rescue of sinners before it is about anything else. The reason we all enjoy the presents and food and family gatherings of Christmas so

much is ultimately because Christmas is our celebration of God's great rescue plan for sinners.

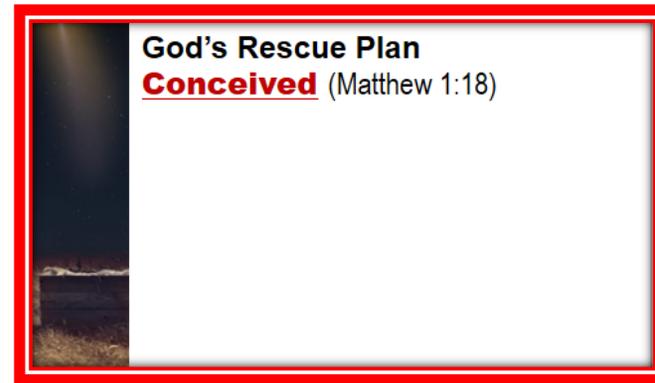
So as our Bibles are open this evening to **Matthew chapter 1, verses 18-25**, let's recognize that,



Jesus was born to rescue you from your sins. Apart from God's rescue, every one of us was perishing in our sins.

But God sent Jesus to accomplish His rescue of sinners like me and you all for His greater glory! Christmas celebrates that what God had promised for centuries actually came to pass when Jesus became a human being: Emmanuel – God with us! All so God Himself could rescue us from the guilt and shame of sin, so we could then live forever with Him in a joyful eternity.

So let's walk through this familiar account together, with a focus on how Matthew's account reveals God's amazing rescue plan for sinners like us.

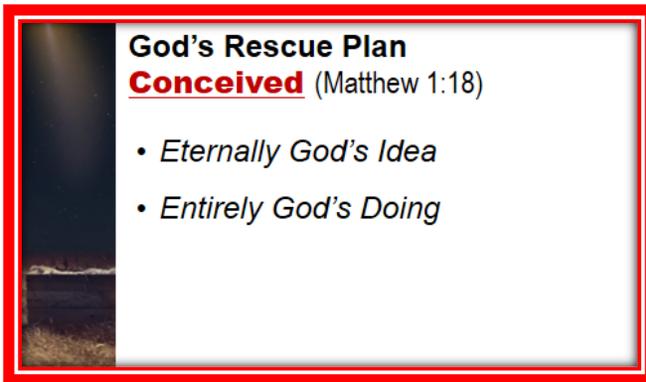


In **Matthew 1:18**, we first see, **God's great Rescue Plan Conceived.**

Would you like to know how God starts His amazing rescue operation of wicked and proud sinners? How is it even possible for God to restore sweet relationship between Himself and His prodigal children?

Well, *the birth of Jesus the Messiah – the birth of the promised Deliverer – the birth of the Anointed Rescuer – took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed – or legally pledged to be married – to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.*

There's two things I want to make sure we notice about God's initiation of His Christmas rescue from this verse:



First, notice that this rescue operation is **eternally God's idea**. Of course God's plan involved other people – but the rescue of sinners through the birth of God's Son into the world was **entirely God's doing**. This is something only God could conceive and bring forth!

Verse 18 is clear. Joseph and Mary were legally considered husband and wife by Jewish custom, yet they were not married and had not yet been physically intimate with one another. Mary was a virgin. Yet she was pregnant!! *She was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.*

God's great rescue of sinners was entirely His initiation. There was nothing Joseph or Mary could have done to initiate God's rescue of sinners. This was a miracle accomplished by the Holy Spirit Himself.

Even as **verse 22** testifies in our text this morning, it was God's idea from the very beginning of creation. Ever since **Genesis 3:15** God had been preparing His people for the Rescuer's arrival, promising in **Isaiah 7:14**, *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold,*

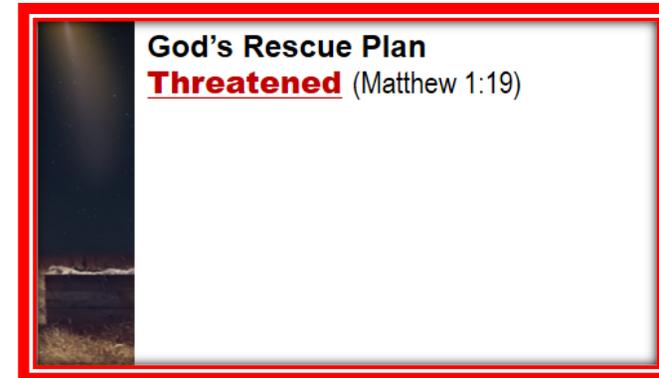
the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Here's the point I want us to remember this morning.

We celebrate Christmas because of what God initiated – entirely of His own doing, exactly as He had promised to do, to bring about our salvation from sin's guilt and shame.

The reason angels and shepherds and magi and prophets and prophetesses all rejoiced¹ at the birth of Jesus was because this was the initiation of God's long-promised rescue plan for sinners like you and me.

But like most rescue operations,

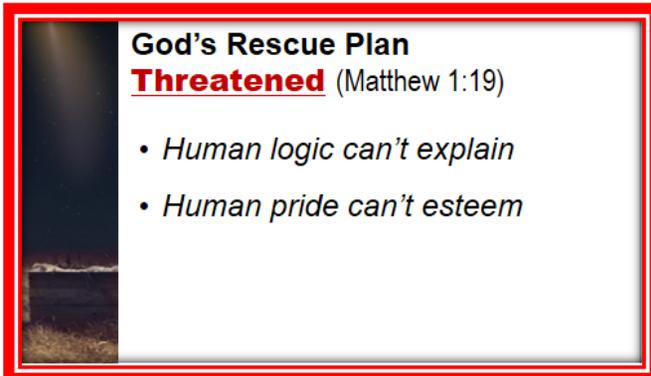


God's Rescue Plan was also Threatened in **verse 19**.

Mary's husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

¹ Luke 2:8-38; Matthew 2:1-12

Joseph's initial response to Mary's pregnancy well illustrates two common obstacles to God's rescue plan for sinners.



God's Rescue Plan
Threatened (Matthew 1:19)

- *Human logic can't explain*
- *Human pride can't esteem*

First, **human logic can't explain** how a virgin could conceive a child by the Holy Spirit. In fact, human logic can't explain why a holy God would desire to send His own Son to the earth to save wicked sinners who just hate and despise Him.

Perhaps this is an issue for you personally this morning? Perhaps you believe the Christmas story is not any more true than Santa Claus and flying reindeer.

So many people stumble over God's rescue plan. Undeserved grace doesn't make sense. And their **human pride can't esteem or accept** such a plan that brings such shame and ridicule from others.

You see, Joseph loved Mary. But logically, how could he trust her anymore? And what would others think and say about her and him once they found out about the pregnancy?

Loved ones – God's way of accomplishing forgiveness and peace between us and Him is foolishness to the world.² When you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and turn from your sin in repentance, this world will mock you and ridicule you and shame you. Our human pride hates that God's saving grace is so unconditional and undeserved by us.

So let me ask you – is your pride hindering you from participating personally in God's Christmas rescue? Are you more concerned with what others might think of you if you really started following Christ?

Joseph was trying to manage the unfortunate situation he found himself in. And in **verse 19** he thought he had come up with the best plan possible.

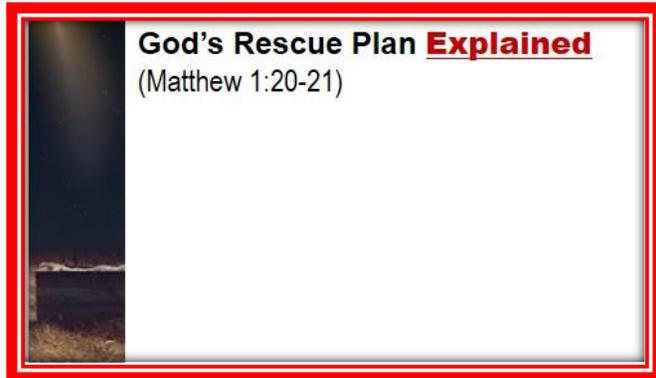
So what about you in your life right now. Are you just trying to manage your way through life's disappointments and failures? Listen – Christianity is not a blind faith. God's Spirit is able to provide us with adequate understanding for His ways through His Word. But your demand to understand everything perfectly about God and His ways before you trust Him will keep you from benefiting from His rescue.

You need to be rescued. You have fallen short of God's standards of perfection. Your own secret sins are known by God, and they deserve eternal punishment.

Therefore, this Christmas is an opportunity for you to humble yourself, and receive Jesus as your Savior – as your rescuer.

² 1 Corinthians 1:18

God is intervening in your life right now with His Divine revelation, just as He did for Joseph in **verses 20-21**,



Where God's Christmas Rescue was Explained.

The Scripture says that *as Joseph considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from ... the Romans?*

Is that how **verse 21** ends? After all, that's the rescue that all the Jewish people thought they were waiting for, right? Their human logic was that God would someday rescue them from their difficult circumstances on earth by changing their earthly conditions. Joseph and Mary – along with all the other faithful Jews in that day – would have been expecting God to rescue them from Roman oppression.

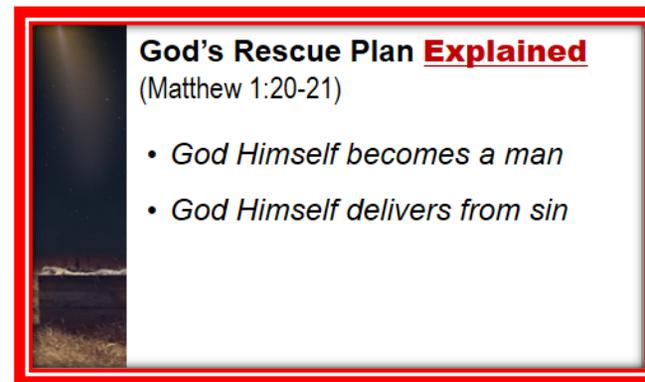
I confess that that's how I often view God and His rescuing grace. I think, there's something that's hard in

my life right now... so God please come and rescue me from it. Come and deliver me out of this hardship!

But that's not the kind of rescue that we celebrate at Christmas is it? Christmas isn't about God rescuing His people from cancer, or from difficult relationships, or from financial pressures.

The heavenly messenger clearly told Joseph to name the baby, *Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*

Here's God's Rescue Plan made clear:



God himself becomes a man by being born through a virgin's womb so that He can do for us what we could never do for ourselves – namely **delivering us from our own sin**.

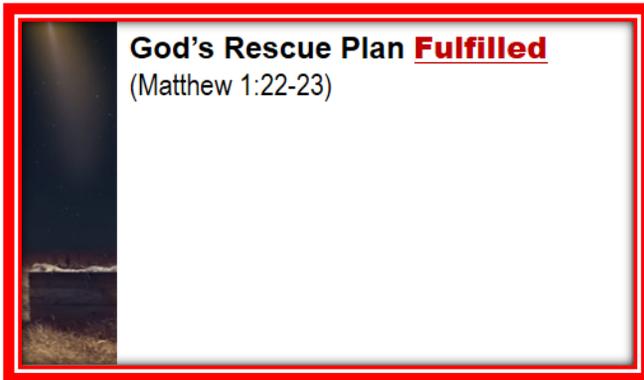
Only a perfect substitute who had no sin of their own could ever justly take the place of a sinner who deserves death as penalty for sin. **Romans 6:23** says *the wages of sin is death...* meaning that all who sin shall die and be separated from our Holy Creator forever. No amount of good works or trying harder is able to turn a sinner into a

saint. Far more significant than our troubles outside of us, is the sin that brings guilt and shame inside of us.

So God's great rescue plan sends Jesus to earth – so that God adds human flesh to his very nature – so that Jesus can become the only sinless human to ever live on this earth – so that His death can provide the atoning and all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of all who believe on Him.

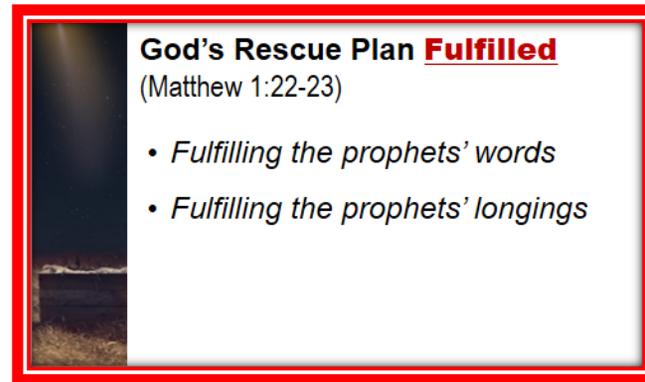
Therefore, imperfect and troubled hearts like ours still have overwhelming cause to rejoice at Christmas!! For God's Christmas rescue was never about earthly troubles – but eternal troubles. God's Christmas rescue offers you salvation from your sin!

Now the angel went on to explain to Joseph that he was participating in the very,



Rescue Plan that **Fulfilled** Messianic prophesy.

So be encouraged loved ones. God always keeps His promises. You can trust God to always keep His Word.



Verse 23 quotes **Isaiah 7:14** as the angel affirms to Joseph that the virgin conception is **fulfilling the prophets' words**. And then the angel adds the definition of *Immanuel, which means, God with us*. This was **fulfilling the prophets' longings**.

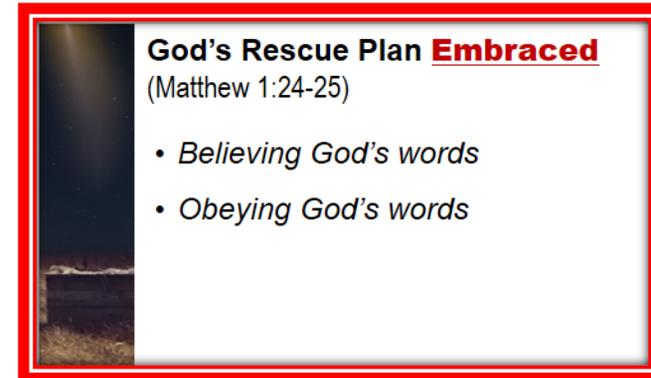
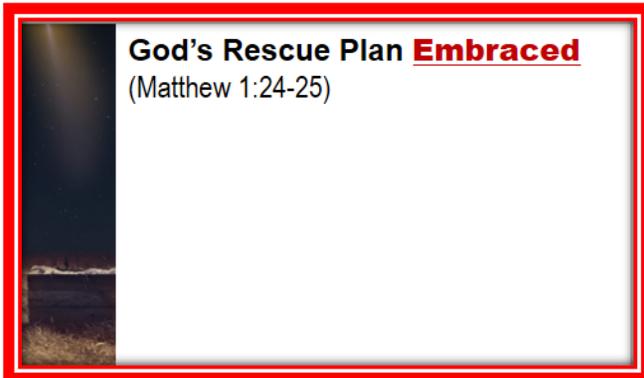
Everyone who has been created by God has an internal longing to be in loving relationship with God. Whether or not you are willing to admit it or not, the Scriptures are clear that you and I will never be more satisfied than when we are living joyfully in the presence of God, and He is dwelling joyfully with us.

So will you believe that Jesus – the baby conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of a virgin – the man who lived without sin for his entire life – the man who died on a cross by the jealousy of the Jews – and the man who rose from the dead to triumphantly declare victory over sin and the grave – will you believe that Jesus is God's Christmas rescue for you?

Jesus fulfilled all of the Messianic prophecies perfectly – exactly how the prophets had predicted Him to be.

So what's your personal response this morning to God's rescue plan for you through Jesus? Will you respond like Joseph and,

But to receive God's rescue doesn't require great feats of strength or long hours of service. Rather, it just requires the humility to,



Embrace God's Rescue by faith in God's Word?

Believe and obey God's words.

Don't sterilize this historical account just because it is so familiar to you. Carefully consider all the emotions Joseph must have wrestled with through these weeks and months. We know from what happened when he arrived at his relatives' home in Bethlehem that he and Mary were shunned and rejected by their family for what they perceived was a pregnancy out of wedlock.³ They despised the unborn child, and shamed Joseph and Mary rather than giving them help and welcome in their need.

Verse 24 says that *When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

My point is this – it wasn't easy for Joseph to embrace God's rescue plan, and it's never easy for us to embrace God's plan of salvation either. To receive God's grace is costly to our pride, and devastating to our flesh.

As much pain and inconvenience as it caused him... Joseph believed God, and obeyed Him. That is faith's response to the revelation of God's gracious rescue plan.

Lord I believe that Jesus is the perfect God-man who came to earth to accomplish my rescue from sin by taking my place. Therefore I believe Jesus' death paid for all my sins, and Jesus' resurrection gives me eternal life. And because I believe this – I now live to obey God – even when my feelings are all out of sort just as Joseph's

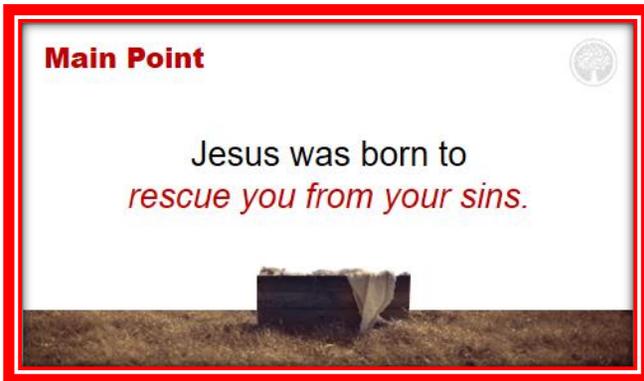
³ Luke 2:7 The word "inn" is better translated "household" or "dwelling" here, as it is a different Greek word than what is used in Luke 10:34. Most likely the "inn" of Luke 2:7 was the home of Joseph's relatives who

rejected and despised the unborn child based on their perceptions of infidelity. C.f. Isaiah 53:3.

must have been – trusting God’s Words as true and trustworthy, and thanking Him for initiating my rescue from sin and its death!!

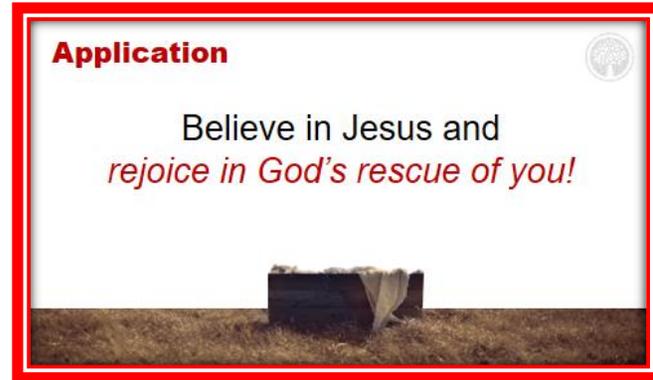
Dear friend – it’s Christmas! Will you participate in God’s rescue by believing and obeying God’s Words today?

Look up from your sin. See its curse as you gaze upon Jesus hanging on the cross in your place. And believe that He did that for you – to bring you to God forever!



After all, Jesus was born to rescue you from your sins!

Christmas is a time to rejoice that slaves have become heirs, and enemies have been made friends!! God Himself has made a way for sinners to come home. All by His grace – and not of anything that we can do. Simply by believing in Christ and His finished work on our behalf alone.



So then, this Christmas, Believe in Jesus and Rejoice in God’s rescue of you!

Don’t let another Christmas go by in which you merely glance at a cradle and forget about the cross. The cradle points to the cross – on which was accomplished Christ’s crown – the salvation of His people from their sins!!

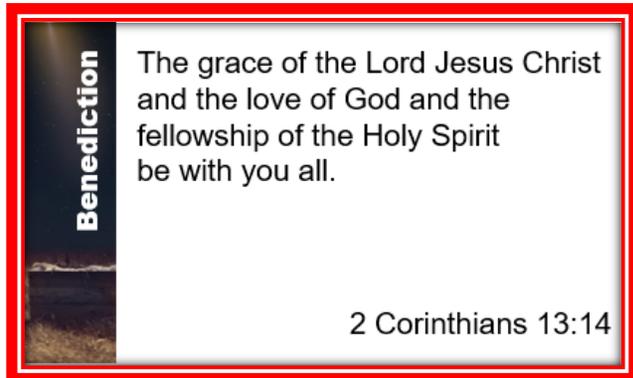
So Merry Christmas New Castle Bible Church!! Your sins can be forgiven through faith in the person and work of Jesus the Messiah. Come and believe on Him today – so that you may know the lasting joy of being rescued by God!



Let's pray.

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Let's pray our benediction together as we dismiss.



*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
2 Corinthians 13:14*

