

I'd like to wish you all a very happy Christmas. Good to have you with us. And we hear again that very familiar story that we hear at Christmastime, of the birth of the baby Jesus. It's one we all know well, but also one which I think continues to surprise and inspire.

I noticed something before in the story as I read it this week that I've never noticed before. And let me ask you, have you ever noticed that Jesus began and ended his life all wrapped up? In Luke 2 we just heard, Mary gave birth to her firstborn. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger. And then we read this about the end of Jesus' life in that same gospel, Luke. Luke 23 says this: Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. He took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth and placed it in a tomb.

Interesting. That's how many people today prefer Jesus. Wrapped. They like to think of Jesus as either a helpless baby or a dead prophet. Either way, he's all wrapped up and out of harm's way. But this makes no sense. The Bible talks about Jesus as God's greatest gift. The gift of himself come amongst us. In Jesus Christ, God has come and made himself known to us. The greatest gift of all.

Having Jesus wrapped up, leaving him wrapped up, is as ridiculous as leaving any gifts that we might get tomorrow wrapped up. It would be crazy not to open them, but just to leave them wrapped up. Pack them away with the decorations. Bring them out next year, all wrapped up. And then pack them away. It doesn't make sense. Gifts are meant to be received and unwrapped. It makes no sense to leave gifts all wrapped up.

But that's, sadly, what we so often do with the gift of Jesus. God's greatest gift of all. We so often get out the baby Jesus once a year, and then leave him for the rest of the year, all wrapped up, still in swaddling clothes until next year.

But look at his story. There were no wrappings that could contain Jesus. The baby grew up. He left his swaddling clothes behind. He grew up to preach an uncompromising message. He said extraordinary things. He said incredible things about himself. It was Jesus who said, "I am the Father all one. Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. No man comes to the

Father but my Me". It was Jesus who claimed that by giving up his own life, he would save others. And he was a man who claimed to be able to forgive sins.

This was an uncomfortable man to be around. He caused a stir. He ruffled feathers. He angered the authorities so much that they had him executed. He died a horrible death and was laid in a stranger's tomb. But even the cloths, which surrounded him in death were not able to hold him.

The final reference to the wrappings of Jesus comes in Luke, Chapter 24. Peter, it says, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves. Jesus did not stay as a baby. Neither did he stay in the tomb. He refuses to be wrapped up. He broke the bonds of death and rose to new life. And his life and death and resurrection give us hope. That's why Christmas is for us such a significant and holy time. This is the heart of the Christmas message, which we celebrate this evening. It's about God coming amongst us in Jesus. Giving us hope and salvation. This is God making himself known to us.

Christmas is a time for the giving and receiving of gifts, including the greatest gift of all. The gift of God himself in Jesus Christ. So let's look at the baby afresh this evening, and make sure we don't leave him all wrapped up.

Amen.