



The General's Christmas Message 2024

I had the privilege earlier this year of attending the *Testify* Congress in the Salvation Army's USA Western Territory. There were many highlights that weekend, but what stood out for me were the amazing stories of transformation. Men and women whose lives had been radically transformed when they encountered God's love for them in the person of Jesus Christ. 'For God so loves the world...' – yes, I changed the tense. The verse actually reads, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son' (John 3:16 *New International Version*). Yet God's love is as real, true and deep today as it was on that first Christmas Day. This remains the greatest evidence of God's love and his plan for all people – the gift of his Son, the gift of our salvation – not just in the past, but for the present as well. This is the good news we celebrate at Christmas.

That news was first declared by the prophet Isaiah long ago: 'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end' (Isaiah 9:6-7 *King James Version*).

It was declared again by the angels at the birth of Jesus: 'And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 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 that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests"' (Luke 2:8-14 *NIV*).

The Bible tells us the shepherds immediately went to where Jesus was, and having seen him they right away began to spread the word. I love that! They immediately began to share their experience. The shepherds recognised Jesus for who he was – their Saviour – and they lost no time in going out and sharing the good news. What a testimony!

Believers ever since have carried on the mission of spreading the word of God's saving, forgiving, redeeming work through his Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. I saw and heard evidence of this at *Testify* – people sharing the good news of God's transformative power in and through their lives, just as the shepherds did on that night so long ago.

In his book, *Sacred Risk*, General Shaw Clifton (Rtd) writes: 'Christmas is summed up in Jesus. The very name of Jesus serves through all history to declare that there is a Saviour. It follows logically therefore that if there is a Saviour it is because we need to be saved. However, even before we realise our need the Saviour is there. It is he who reveals to us our deepest needs, gently urging us by his Holy Spirit to make a response to his offer of salvation. Christmas is therefore discovering or rediscovering or reaffirming Jesus as Saviour, and in discovering him we discover ourselves and our true condition.'

God can still change the hearts of men and women and make them live again. And like the shepherds, we can testify of that good news with those around us.



INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

This Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of the Saviour, let's ask God to empower us with Holy Spirit zeal to spread the word concerning Jesus, that still more might come to experience the love of God as revealed in the gift of his precious Son and our Saviour, Jesus, the Son of God.

Commissioner Bronwyn joins me in praying God's blessings for you this Christmas season.

Lyndon Buckingham
General