

Christmas Eve 2016

Welcome to our Christmas Eve services; My name is Rob Willey and I'm the SP here at Harvest; We count these services among our favorites of the year . . .

And hope you'll do the same; In fact . . .

We're going to do our best to set this night apart as holy, b/c Christ the Savior is born

So let me encourage you to fix your mind on things above; Things of peace; Things of joy; Things of hope; And glorify the One who makes it all possible

God, be exalted in this place; Fill us with your Spirit, and shine brightly in our souls
We worship and adore you; With joy unspeakable, full of glory
(**Video** – The Christmas Scale)

(Worship Set – 5 Songs)

➤ (**Devotional**) **Christmas Eve** is a lot of things, isn't it? Family, fun, food
But at the core, it's a night of remembrance; Anticipation; Wonder; Worship; Hope

And surrounding all that, is holiness; Christmas Eve is a night of *holiness*
Something we *sing* about, with *O Holy Night* and other carols, but don't really talk about; Maybe b/c the facts are easier to see, or easier to accept

➤ Like that fact that it was nighttime; It's *O Holy Night* b/c that's when the angels *announced* it; And most likely when Mary and Joseph checked in to the manger
Travel by day, sleep by night

I remember a time as a little boy (about your age), when we were traveling as a family, and my parents were trying to find a hotel
It wasn't something we *normally* did, and we certainly didn't have a smart phone or iPad to search online; We didn't even have a cell phone
It was the Dark Ages; Right after Jesus was born☺

So on that particular night, we just stopped at hotels when we saw one
Dad would pull up; Mom would go in; Mom would come out shaking her head; And we'd go on to the next one; And the next one, and the next one, and the next one
And while I don't remember how many we *tried*, I do know that the stress of it *tested* us; So that *our* night was anything *but* holy

➤ Not theirs; Not Joseph and Mary's; Their night was holy through and through
Set apart for God's use, and marked by righteousness and purity
That's *holiness*; And the night Jesus was born, was it; **Christmas Eve was holy**

First of all, b/c . . .

It was foretold by holy prophets (Lk 1:68-70)

Men of old, who spoke and wrote God's words, under the inspiration or influence of God's Spirit; They were holy men of God; Or as the Bible says it . . .
God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old (Lk 1:70)

➤ Prophets like *Isaiah*, who said (Is 9:6) – *To us a child is born, to us a son is given . . . and his name shall be called . . . Mighty God* [among other things]

And how about *Jeremiah*? Who recorded God's words that he would raise someone up, and he would *reign as king and deal wisely* . . .

And . . . execute justice and righteousness in the land. (Jer 23:5)

And *Micah*; Who spoke with *unbelievable* specificity; Saying . . .

You, O Bethlehem . . . from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days . . . And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD . . . And they shall dwell secure . . . And he shall be their peace. (Micah 5:2-5)

Christmas Eve was holy b/c it was foretold by holy prophets

2nd . . .

The Holy Spirit made it happen (Mt 1:18; Lk 1:35)

God's Spirit; Like Matthew says of Jesus

When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph [formally engaged], before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. (Mt 1:18)

He made it happen

Or how about the angel's words to Mary, when she was like, "Uh, Houston, we have a problem; I'm not married; How can I possibly have a baby?"

And the angel responded by saying – *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you*

Christmas Eve was holy b/c the Holy Spirit of God made it happen

3rd . . .

Holy angels announced it (Mt 1:18-25)

Implied by the fact that angels stand in the presence of holy God, and do his bidding (Lk 1:19); Something they couldn't *possibly* do if they were *sinful*

Meaning they *too* are set apart for God's use in all righteousness and purity
They too are holy

And therefore announced Christ's birth

First to Joseph, in a dream; Saying that Mary, his fiancé, *will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins* (Mt 1:21)

And then to Mary herself; Saying that Jesus *will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High* (Lk 1:32); God in the flesh

And then to the shepherds as they filled the skies; Marking Christmas Eve as a holy night, forever

But that's not it; There were holy people as well; Who paved the way

Holy people prepared the way (Lk 1:16-17)

Like Zechariah, the faithful temple priest; And his wife Elizabeth; Parents of John the Baptist and related to Mary; They were righteous before God [the Bible says] . . .

Walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statues of the Lord (Lk 1:6)
They weren't *perfect*, but they were *holy*

And so was John the Baptist, their son; Who prepared the way for *Jesus*

Like it says in Lk 1:16-17 . . .

He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. [16] And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God . . . to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

Holy people, filled with the Holy Spirit, prepared the way for Jesus at Christmas Eve, by preparing others to receive him

5th . . .

Holy parents believed and trusted (Lk 1:38)

Referring of course to Joseph and Mary

A *just man* the Bible says; And merciful, not wanting Mary to be shamed
And a man who *believed* – believed the angel's message; And acted accordingly
That's holy (Mt 1:24)

As was Mary; Who after hearing the news of her forthcoming pregnancy . . .
Said to the angel – *Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.* (Lk 1:38) IOW she believed and trusted
Not that she was perfect once again, but holy; Set apart
Making Christmas Eve holy all the more

And then last, Christmas Eve was holy b/c . . .

Holy God became flesh (Lk 2:11)

Referring to Jesus; The Son of God; Who *became flesh and dwelt among us* the Bible says
(Jn 1:14); *Being born in the likeness of men* (Phil 2:7) (Worship Team up)
Giving up none of his divinity

Christmas Eve was holy, b/c holy God *became* us, and *came* to us
So that even if all the others had been dreadfully wicked, it *still* would have been holy
It *still* would have been set apart for God's use; It *still* would have been characterized
by righteousness and purity

B/c when *God* enters the scene, whether the scene of your heart or the scene of this world,
everything *pales* in comparison

So no matter how you look at it, Christmas Eve was a night of holiness

➤ **And it still is;** It's *still* holy (Start O Holy Night melody)
As we set it apart, to remember and reflect on all that God *did*
All that he foretold; All that he fulfilled; All that he intended in saving our souls
through faith in his Son; All that he's doing in making *us* holy (1 Pet 1:16)

Christmas Eve *was* holy, and it's *still* holy
Especially as we invite the Holy Spirit to fill our heart and renew our minds
It *was* holy and it's *still* holy, as we worship the Holy *One* of whom it's about

It *was* holy and it's *still* holy, as we fall on our knees and hear the angel voices
Declaring "Christ is the Lord, O praise his name forever"
It *was* holy then, and it's holy now
So let's stand and sing it out – *O Holy Night*; The stars are brightly shining

➤ (After the song; **Blank Background**) There's one more reason Christmas Eve is holy
B/c *the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light* (Is 9:2) (Light Candle)
Referring of course, to Jesus; And us; He's the *great light*, and we're the people in
darkness

And when he became flesh, when he was born, the light dawned; Holiness appeared;
Righteousness emerged; Grace arrived
So that we wouldn't have to remain in sin
Christmas Eve is holy b/c the light shines

➤ But you have to see it; Like Jesus himself said in Jn 12:46
I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.
That's how you see *now* – you believe; In who he is and what he's done
Who he is as God in the flesh, and what he's done in dying for your sins
Seeing is believing, and believing is seeing

If that's you, if you believe in him . . .
What a great time to *let your light shine before others* (Mt 5:16)
If it's not, if you don't believe, what a great time to light your candle, and start

Pray – (Staff come forward; Becky on stage; Lights off)

Lord, thank you for making such an ordinary night, extraordinary; Full of hope, and joy,
and peace, and wonder
So fill our hearts now with your love, and our lives with your light (**Is 60:1**)
And receive our worship as we remember your birth, on this silent and holy night
In Jesus' name . . .