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This year COVID-19 came from nowhere and changed everything. My family were looking forward to a long service leave holiday in Canada and America. Saving up for it for 5 years. Planning for the last year. Everything booked & paid for and then suddenly nothing. And even now 9 months after it was cancelled I am still fighting to get much of my money back.

But for you it might not have been a holiday but a lost job. Or you had to move back to your parents place in order to pay the bills. Or you have struggled with school work or uni work or work online. Or maybe it was the social distancing. Or your struggles with your own mental health. Or you couldn't see your family interstate or overseas. Or your loved ones were isolated from you in nursing home or hospitals. Or the fear of actually getting COVID yourself. Or you have now reached Christmas and you can't have a family gathering.

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And the answer long term for us all is a vaccine. So all at once over 200 groups starting looking for a solution. Looking for a way to get our lives back to normal. A way to return to the world that we knew and loved. Except I think for many of us COVID made us stop and wonder is that really the world that we want to go back to?

A world of extreme climate and bushfires. Pollution and bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef. Materialism and the pursuit of more and more things. Extreme busyness, stress, anxiety. The never getting anywhere treadmill? When we stopped, when we were forced to stop, many of us in a way breathed a sigh of relief. Before we got anxious again because we didn't want to go back to the old normal. We don't even know we want to find in a new normal.

Recently I have received as Christmas email from a friend saying to me they are not looking forward to next year even with a vaccine fast approaching because life wasn't OK before and they see no hope of it being OK in 2021. It got me thinking what we need is not just a Vaccine for COVID-19 but a vaccine for life itself.

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So if that is what you feel, I have good news for you today. Hope is on its way. A vaccine was developed many years ago that has proved not just 90% effective but 100% effective. For its three main ingredients are hope, joy and peace. And it is a vaccine that is administered to us when we come to grips with the Jesus story that we are presented with at Christmas time. The big pharmaceuticals haven't found the magic formula but God our Creator is offering to give us all a free jab today. Because the one who will give us this vaccine is his son Jesus.

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Now you may have heard the Jesus story before but you have to admit it is truly astonishing. Something that has been part of the bedrock of Western culture for over 2000 years and yet a story that most people think today is highly improbable. A story you might file just to the left of the Easter bunny & slightly to the right of the tooth family. But if by some miracle, some Christmas miracle you could grasp this story today I assure you that it would bring you

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1. Hope (Luke 1:46-55)

And let's be honest hope is in short supply at the moment. It must be manufactured in China and stuck in some Australia Post warehouse. In his book *Man's Search for meaning*, Victor Frankl, who followed Sigmund Freud at Vienna argued that the *"the loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect on man(kind)."* As Frankl looked at the experiences of men caught up in concentration camps in WW2 he discovered *"any attempt to restore a man's inner strength in camp had first to succeed in showing him some future goal."*

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What he is saying is that we all need hope in the future. And Christmas gives us that sort of hope in spades. When an angel appeared to Mary around 3BC, Mary was greatly troubled. ³⁰*"But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ & he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end."*

Hope comes to Mary through God sending her a King. Someone who could change the situation. Someone who would rule not in their own way but in God's way. Someone whose kingdom would never end. And when he rules what does this King bring to his subjects?

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Mary catches a glimpse of what that kingdom would look like and so she sings a song of hope. And although the things that are being promised to Mary are in the future, she speaks as if they have already happened. Because if God has started this process by sending his Son into Mary's womb then the rest of his promises are as good as done.

You see God "has been mindful of the humble state of his servant." God has not forgotten his people. He is personally involved with all humanity. God's greatness is not revealed in his isolation to us but in his intimacy with us. For he sends blessings. He reverses the status quo. He lifts up the humble & brings down the proud. He fills the hungry with good things. He helps his people. He remembers our state & he promises to turn this world upside down.

That's why he is sending the world this baby. To bring in a new type of kingdom that will change everything. And it is this king that brings us hope. So are you hungry, lonely, empty or feel forgotten today? Do you feel that this world has chewed you up and spat you out?

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Then line up for the jab. Get the Christmas vaccine. Jesus coming into the world is not just business as usual. He comes to give you God's great gift of hope. And if you are full, happy, content then also line up for the jab. Because 2020 has shown us that life can change in an instant. And that most of what we thought would give us meaning in life doesn't actually give us much at all. Our only hope then comes in Jesus. But there is more to this vaccine than just hope there is also

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2. Peace (Luke 2:14)

And that is something else that we all desperately need this Christmas. Because it seems that we are more divided than ever. Yes there still continues to be wars fought in Albania, Afghanistan, North Africa and the Middle East. But there is more tension with China, and North Korea and Iran. And even in the most stable nations in the USA, France, Britain and Australia democracy is under severe pressure. We are fraying at the edges.

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The American Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in the middle of the American War of Independence lost his wife in a terrible incident and welcomed home his oldest son from the battlefield terribly injured; but wrote these words on Christmas Day 1863, *"And in despair I bowed my head; "There is no peace on earth," I said; "For hate is strong, And mocks the song. Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

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But that was the song that the angels sang at the birth of Jesus Christ. They appeared to the shepherds, those unclean people who were constantly living on the edge of society, & said ¹⁰*"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. ¹² This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."* ¹³*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God & saying ¹⁴ 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."*

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Peace that is what we all want. Peace on earth. Peace at home. At work. In society. Within ourselves. But how do we get that sort of peace? Well when a cyclone comes hurtling towards land it causes havoc and chaos above the surface but just 10 metres below the water, the fish go on living completely unaware of the carnage going on above. You see there is a deeper solution to the chaos of this world. Peace comes from a deep relationship with the God of peace. Peace with God is the starting point for peace on God's earth.

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And Jesus is the one that brings both of those things to us as a Christmas gift. He knocks down the barrier between us and God which our sin had built up. He demolishes the walls that we constructed to keep others out by enabling grace, love and forgiveness to flow to us from God and from us in God's strength. So join me as we line up for a jab of peace. It too is a part of God's Christmas vaccine. Let this baby grow up as a man. And die on the cross to forgive your sins. That will bring you peace with God and peace within yourself and over time peace with others. Hope and peace and lastly

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3. Joy (Luke 2:8-20)

This is the big one isn't it? This is the sugar hit that we all want at Christmas time. The joy of holidays. The joy of family and friends. The joy of plenty of presents. And yet the Christmas period rarely delivers the much anticipated joy it promises. Because we so often put our trust in people to make us happy. Or worse still we put our trust in material things.

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A while back the Australian Psychology Association website posted this comment *"We're living through an epidemic of over consumption, materialism, debt, waste and stress."* Interesting that they used the word epidemic isn't it? But the post was pointing out that we are addicted to buying more stuff. Whereas psychological studies over and over again prove that materialism doesn't produce happiness. But produces depression and anxiety instead.

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And if Christmas is all about consumption and family and food no wonder it fails to bring about any deep seated joy. But here the angels are saying the shepherds that coming to Jesus will bring them joy. ¹⁰*But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."*

And so the shepherds go to Bethlehem and they bow the knee at the new born king and they come back full of joy. ²⁰ *"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."* They had found their joy in Jesus! And they wanted to spread that Joy to those around them. Joy to the world, the Lord has come.

Joy comes through knowing that God has come into the world, into our world. Hope comes when we know that he is here to overturn our values and install God's chosen King Jesus. Peace comes when we make peace with God & admit that we have been his enemies and so ask for him to forgive us. And all these come through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Who doesn't stay in a manger but ends up on the cross. Dying so that we might live. So that we might have his peace, his hope and his joy.

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CS Lewis wrote a book which talked about his conversion entitled *Surprised by Joy*. When God's Joy came into his life it changed everything. Our Churches associate Jon Brown told us a few weeks ago when he became a Christian he walked to the beach and everything seemed to be now in technicolour. Life before was black and white but now he was simply overwhelmed by colour. And when I became a Christian 40 years ago during a Church outreach campaign called Spring 80, it changed my life.

It was a vaccine that has brought me 40 years of hope, 40 years of peace and 40 years of joy. In the midst of COVID and conflict. In both bull markets and bear markets. In times of loneliness and loveliness. This Christmas vaccine doesn't promise that the cyclones won't come but in the midst of the tough times it hides you in the depths of God's love and protects you from the very things that would steal away your hope and joy and peace.

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But how do you know this is true? Don't just take my word for it. Don't just believe the word of other people in church today. Get the jab, the Christmas jab. Open your life to the work of King Jesus. Trust your uncertain future to the God who holds your future in his hands. Believe in Him. Trust in Him. Follow Him.

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And what if the Christmas vaccine doesn't work? Well let me introduce you to the Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal and his famous wager. He says if God doesn't exist and the message of Christmas is false, you really have lost nothing. But if it is true and Jesus did come to the manger and go onto the cross then you have the chance to gain everything.

So if I am wrong, keep looking for the right vaccine. But if I am right today you can find in Jesus Christ hope, peace and joy. Gifts from God to you through his son Jesus Christ. That's a wager I would bet my life upon. What about you?