

Our dog (Jessie), is a really old border collie / kelpie cross. She's old, and scraggly, she's riddled with arthritis, stiff-legged. Her collar, is a chain collar, but she's also got a bit of red ribbon tied around her, that got put there one Christmas, some time in the last decade....

Anyway, the other day, I went for an early morning bike-ride. And as I left, I didn't notice her at the house (not that I was looking for her). But she'd have to be at the house, wouldn't she – she's not really mobile.

So I left. And I rode straight down Barlee Street to the river, turned left and headed towards the weir... Anyway, when I got to about the boat ramp, there was Jessie – doing her best to trot along the river bank. Border collie/kelpie cross; old; scraggly; riddled with arthritis; red collar thing on her neck. ... Trying with every bit of energy she could muster, to get along with those stiff, arthritic legs of hers.

I couldn't believe it... She was more than a km from home. So I turned around and went back to her... And from the road, I called out, "Jessie!!, Come here" And she did exactly what I expected her to do – she's stone deaf and half blind... So she totally ignored me. She kept on doing what she was doing – painfully, and stiffly trying to get somewhere – but who knows where...

What was I to do??? I had to get somebody down there with the ute, to pick Jessie up before she had a coronary at the boat ramp...

But I had a dilemma, you see, because when I left home, Robyn was still in bed sound asleep... And so I considered all other possible options, very carefully for about $\frac{3}{4}$ second,

before I rang and woke her up. And while she was on the phone, she looked out the glass door and said “Jessie’s laying on the mat on the veranda”

And at about that moment, a jogger came past, and as he went past the boat ramp, the Jessie look-a-like, did a u-turn and followed him...

I couldn’t believe it... I was certain that was our dog...

And some of you may have heard that story (because any story that makes me look a bit silly tends to get repeated by my wife and children), and at this point, you might be thinking, “Oh, he gets everything confused these days. And now he’s got the babies confused...”

By the way, I **am** having a bit of trouble keeping up with all these babies.

- Madison Hannah
- Sophie Nock
- Ruben Smit
- Matthew Neville

And now, Christmas morning, I should be preaching about baby Jesus, but here I am, preaching about baby, John the Baptist – I **must** be losing my marbles.

But this is all part of the Christmas story too. And Luke uses the story of baby John the Baptist, to introduce to us, the **adult** Jesus. ... Luke wants us to know, “**Why** Jesus was born. He wants us to know Jesus' **purpose** for coming”, so that we can understand what Christmas is all about.

And if we come to Christmas unprepared, we miss the whole significance of this visitation of Heavenly Royalty.

John the Baptist came, to prepare the way for Jesus....

There's a lot of preparations to be made, when a baby's on its way, hey...

- You've got to get the nursery ready
- Cot
- Nappies
- Nappy buckets
- Pram
- High chair
- Choose the names
- Go to the huff & blow classes
- Stock up on various cleaning products and baby creams and liquid panadol & what-ever other chemical compound, we men simply don't understand....

But that's not the sort of preparation we're talking about.

Jesus was coming, as saviour of the world,, which meant that the world needed to know that it **needed** a saviour... And the message of John, was intended to prepare us, for exactly that – To give us, “**knowledge of salvation**” “**in the forgiveness of sins**”...

Advertisers are all very busy, in the lead-up to Christmas, aren't they. And the purpose of advertising, is to convince us

that we cannot possibly live without, a certain thing that we've never needed in the past...

But John wasn't interested, in advertising – John wasn't into marketing... – John wasn't attempting to sell us a product, that we didn't need... All John had to do, was give knowledge, where there was none. He gave knowledge, to those who were ignorant.

Well, that's gotta be someone else, hey, because none of us here are “ignorant”, are we? (No. Never.) We certainly don't like to **think** of ourselves as “ignorant”... but the fact of the matter is, most people (even in our own community), are totally ignorant of the fact that they need a saviour...

At Christmas time, we can all get together, and sing about the fact that “a saviour is born”,,, but for what purpose??? Unless I know I need a saviour... - who cares???? And **that** was **John's** mission – to inform the world, that they needed a saviour... But more than that.

because of the tender mercy of our *God*, Jesus, in His coming, would give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,....
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

It's almost poetic... It sounds enticing, but what does it mean?

What it means, is without Jesus, I sit in darkness, and the shadow of death... That can't be good.... And no it's not...

Without Jesus, every human being, lives their life, in the shadow of death. No matter how much you manage to achieve in life – whether it be financial, or business, or relationships, or family.... When it all boils down, even our very best achievements, are under the shadow of death...

That's the paradox of life. Our entire life (whether we know it or not), is shadowed by our inevitable death. We all die. Some die younger than others, but we all die...

And what I choose to do with Jesus in **this** life, determines whether death is a dark shadow, or an entrance into the bright light of the presence of God.

The coming of Jesus Christ, is like the rising of the sun, which removes the shadow of death. And that's why, our response to Jesus is so very important. In Jesus, He takes us from that shadow of death, and becomes our light of life...

And that's why (at Christmas time) we sing “Joy to the World, the Lord is come”. To understand the joy of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must first understand, our need for a saviour. The need to repent of sin, and to turn to Jesus as Lord.

The King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, was born, in the most humble of circumstances. And when we bow down to Jesus Christ **as** King of Kings and Lord of Lords, he takes away the

shadow of death. In Him, no darkness can be found. In Him,
is light and life.

Merry Christmas everyone.

And may the Lord **guide our feet** into the way of peace.

In Christ Jesus.

Amen.