I wonder if any of you have come across any of those ‘all year round’ Christmas shops. I first came across them springing up some years ago in downtown shopping malls in America, and it seems the trend has made its way to this side of the Pond. Because, lo and behold, there’s even a ‘Ye Olde Christmas Shoppe’ that’s appeared on the historic Royal Mile in Edinburgh. Now you can purchase all your decorations for the festive season during the height of summer when the temperature is 25C. No longer do we need to simply wish it could be Christmas every day - now we’ve got shops like this where it really is Christmas every day – or at least their take on it!

I would like to suggest this afternoon, though, that when we get to grips with the real message of Christmas, we discover that it has profound implications, not just for the festive season, but for the whole of our lives, all year round, 24/7 – and indeed, beyond that, into eternity.

In fact, Christmas touches upon some of the biggest questions of life: ‘What’s it all about?’ ‘Is there any meaning to it all?’, ‘Why is the world in such a mess?’, ‘How do I know God exists, and if he does exist, how can I come to know him?’ When we reflect upon the various readings from the Bible we’ve been hearing today, and the familiar words of some of the carols we’ve been singing, we begin to see the answers to these key questions of life emerging.

We started out with a reading from the beginning of the Bible - from the book of Genesis – where we’re reminded that as human beings, from the very beginning, we have been disobedient to the God who made us. We have constantly turned away from God and we’ve sought to go our own way. We have well and truly messed up. And so today we continue to see the consequences of our rebelliousness - all the evil we see in our world, in our communities and in our own lives.

And so, at that first Christmastide, God came to us in the form of a baby,
to save us from our sin - all our wrongdoing - and to bring us back to him. Through Jesus, born for us at Christmas, we can know God personally. The things is, we tend to like to celebrate the baby Jesus lying in a manger at Christmas, but then we shut Jesus away for the rest of the year, as though he has no relevance to us in our day-to-day lives. But the story doesn’t simply begin and end at Christmas. Because at Easter we remember that the same Jesus - God made man - who came to us at Christmas, died on the Cross and rose again from the dead, so that our sins may be forgiven and so that we may have eternal life. He was “born that man no more may die.” When we watch an episode of Eastenders or Coronation Street which ends in some kind of a ‘cliffhanger’, we’re naturally excited about wanting to see the next episode; soap operas work on the basis that their storylines are constantly ‘to be continued…’ In the same way, Christmas is a story ‘to be continued’ – to be continued and completed at Easter. Christmas makes no sense without Easter.

So, at the heart of the Christmas message is the truth that God has come to us in Jesus Christ. It’s a message which requires a response from each one of us. Because God invites us to accept Jesus into our lives as our personal Lord and Saviour, so that we might be forgiven for all our wrongdoing, and that we may have eternal life in him. The Virgin Mary, when it had been announced to her that she had been chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus, she responded, “let it be with me according to your word” – she said ‘yes’ to the Lord. So, are we willing to say ‘yes’ to the Lord - to allow Christ to “cast out our sin, and enter in, [to] be born in us today.”

And when we accept God’s gift of Jesus Christ into our hearts and lives, we can know real joy. After the shepherds had visited the Christ child lying in the manger in Bethlehem, the Bible tells us that they went away “glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen” - they were full of joy. When the star which the wise men were following had stopped over the place where the child lay, it says “they were overwhelmed with joy”. The shepherds and the wise men were full of joy when they found the Lord. Theirs was not a joy which came from earthly pleasures, but rather an indescribable joy which came from God. Yes, all the nice
presents we receive this Christmas and all the food we’ll enjoy, perhaps
give us a fleeting sense of happiness – a kind of joy which is here today
and gone tomorrow. But when we come to know the Lord Jesus in our
lives, we can know a deep and lasting joy which comes from God alone - a
joy which doesn’t ignore all the difficulties we face in life, but which rather
sustains us through them, as we journey on each day.

In our final Bible reading this afternoon, which we’ll be hearing in a
moment, we come to the very heart of what Christmas is really all about:
that God, the maker and sustainer of the universe, has come among us in
the person of Jesus Christ – the ‘Word-made-Flesh’, as the author of
John’s Gospel puts it. It reminds us that although no-one has ever seen
God, God’s only Son, Jesus Christ, has made him known to us. In other
words, when we see Jesus, we see God; when we know Jesus, we know
God.

And a little later on in the same Gospel, we find these well-known words -
“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone
who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” Jesus offers
each one of us this gift of life - life in all its fullness - “Light and life to all he
brings.”

So, do you wish it could be Christmas every day – Christmas all year
round? Well, it can be – not in a frivolous, commercial sense, of course,
but in a way that is truly life-transforming. Because God offers us the
greatest gift of all – a gift which is far superior to anything we can pick at
an all-year-round Christmas shop, on Black Friday or in the January sales –
it’s the gift of new life in Jesus Christ. When we accept this most precious
of gifts, then we will truly discover that ‘Jesus is for life, not just for
Christmas’.