

John 1:9–13

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[0 : 0 0] That's John 1, 9 through 13. The true light which enlightens everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, good morning. One of the wonderful rhythms of life through weekly participation in a Sunday service is just how the seasons of the year work differently on your mind and heart week by week.

And it seems to me that today, from the very first word in this public service about the entrance of Marcus Mitchell into heaven, it has kind of set the tone for a moment when we just pause, do we not?

Where we reflect, where we spend a Sunday in anticipation of Christmas, not trying to work up all the emotional vigor worthy of the season, but merely asking the Lord to minister to us in his presence.

[1 : 3 9] And there's something nice about a quiet participation of our mind and heart as we look toward the birth of our Savior. This morning, about 5 o'clock, I received a call from Mila saying that Marcus had just passed into the presence of the Lord.

And so I was able to be with his body and with her just about 30 minutes after that. Shortly, his family arrived, and his mother and brother and his aunties were there, and we had a sweet time. You need to know that Marcus passed away with a copy of Samuel Rutherford's *The Loveliness of Christ in His Hands*. Chuckie Dye, a dear friend of his, was with him just less than 48 hours before reading to him from that precious book.

Marcus went into the presence of the Lord, having been prepared by a dear friend who was reading to him on the loveliness of Christ.

Hey, I remember when this auditorium was under construction. I recall individuals in the season of COVID coming in the back, working their way down, receiving communion from me on the floor, and then exiting that door.

[3 : 1 0] I'll never forget Marcus parading in what is now the balcony, praising God, singing hallelujahs. In fact, you know, Marcus is only one man, but the hallelujahs have multiplied in heaven this morning.

Yeah. He sees by sight what we yet behold only by faith.

I hope you'll make plans to be here on the 30th. It will be quite something for this entire city.

Such was his witness across the length of our our town. He's arrived. Arrival.

That's actually the meaning of the word Advent. I know we do some strange things here on Sunday that you might not be familiar with given your previous history with churches or the Christian message at all.

[4 : 2 5] But there is something called a season of Advent. It simply means a season where the church historically has tried to put their mind on on one idea, namely his arrival.

The arrival of our Savior in Bethlehem. The coming of Christ. It goes back probably to the fifth century in Spain and in Gaul where a bishop had a number of congregants who were preparing for baptism.

He chose Epiphany Sunday for their baptism. If you don't know what Epiphany Sunday is, it's the it's the first Sunday of the new calendar year. This year it'll be January 6th.

It commemorates the arrival of the Magi who had come from afar to worship him. Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

And on that Sunday a group of men and women were going to be baptized. They were going to start the year as Christians. and he had them prepare by fasting and by prayers and a studied preparation of Advent.

[5 : 45] You've got to leave it to the German Lutherans of the 16th century to come up with a wreath and candles and a weekly commemoration of we are going to think intentionally about the coming of Christ.

That story we're not really quite sure how it emerged but from what I've been told there was a pastor who had a lot of kids in the church and they kept wondering is it Christmas yet? You know how children can be. Is it Christmas yet? Is it Christmas yet? And he kept telling them no it's not so he took a big wheel and he made 24 candles around the outside and began to light one every day so that visually they would see he's coming but he hasn't yet come this arrival this Advent.

Did you notice the text uses the imagery of Advent the true light verse 9 which gives light to everyone was coming into the world he was coming he was near to his moment of arrival and yet the text lets us know that while the creator of the universe the word who was with God the word who was God the word through which nothing else that had been created was created this this one was coming this true light was coming the creator into the created order he was going to arrive and the text tragically indicates verse 10 he was in the world and the world was made through him yet oh the power of little words in literature yet the world did not know him the world did not recognize Jesus as the very word of God when he was now entering in condescending as it were to part of the created order you know urban legend has it that there was a proprietor of a Irish pub that happened to be a place where Bono when he was in town would like to come and enjoy a pint and as the story and believe me I'm guessing it's just a story goes the proprietor receives a call that Bono is on his way and he wants to have his normal seat by the window and he's got a friend with him and sure enough the proprietor hangs up and goes to a couple of people that are at that table and says can you please move I'm going to move you to a different table I'm sorry but Bono is arriving and this is his normal place to sit and so sure enough they move wouldn't you move and they moved and 15 minutes later Bono walks in with his friend he sits down they have a drink they're enjoying their time and the person who had been moved said

[9 : 09] I'm not going to waste this opportunity I'm going to look for my chance I want my picture with Bono so he waits not wanting to interrupt the conversation and finally Bono stands to leave and the man goes over to him at the door and he says to Bono's friend would you mind would you mind taking my phone and getting my picture with Bono and the friend says sure I'd be glad to and he lifts the camera up and he puts his arm around Bono and the picture is taken and Bono and his friend depart and the proprietor rushes up to the individual and says do you have any idea what you've just done no you don't know do you you don't know who you just asked to take your picture with Bono and he says well of course not he goes that was Bruce Springsteen you just asked the boss to take your photo with Bono Jesus the boss is coming into the world and the world didn't know him in fact the world even to this day makes unwitting use of him to frame some lesser light now this would be tragic that Jesus was in our midst having created the world yet the world did not know him look at verse 11 it gets worse he came to his own there's that word came again he was coming but now it's past tense the advent has arrived he was coming we didn't know him we didn't recognize him but he came it says here to his own and his own people did not receive him

I mean these two lines back to back are worth contemplating aren't they not quite exactly sure what's meant by he came to his own in a very wooden way you could translate it he came to his own things the things that he had created the created order the translators here use the word people and that's because the following context begins to emerge that those who did receive him in contrast and so some people have thought that what's really intended here is he came to his own people he came to the people of promise he was born a Jew under the law by a woman and he came to the people of promise and it wasn't just that the world didn't know him it's that his own people of promise didn't receive him notice the distinction in word it's one thing to know someone to acknowledge someone to be aware of someone's presence but this is a stronger term now his own did not receive him it's simply the idea of welcome they did not welcome him just think for a moment whether you're traveling home to your own over the next few days or you have your own coming to you over the next few days imagine coming to the door of your family wherever you may go between now and the 31st or your family coming to your door from wherever they came from

between now and the 31st and the knock comes upon the door and the door is open and your family is here and there is no reception of them this is what the writer wants you to know as tragic as it is that Jesus was coming into the world and the world was not ready to recognize him even more so those who were his own who should have known a little more they weren't ready to receive him they weren't ready to open the door to him this is not just some stranger knocking upon your door looking for a little help over the holidays this is the king of kings who is the promised one to whom we should be ready for and we did not receive him we did not welcome have a resistant sense of might to them not meekness to them this is an interesting way to begin the text but this is what the writer wants you to know the tragedy that

Christmas was missed that Advent was coming the world wasn't ready that Advent came and we did not receive but then the text fortunately takes a turn does it not I love this in verse 12 but to all who did receive him who believed in his name can we just sit on this word but for a moment please but a small word with inestimable significance at times you need to know that the tiniest of entities can alter the most significant of outcomes your life can turn on the word but the trajectory of sporting teams move from wins and losses on the word but just recently and I don't follow it but I read of two

NFL teams that were at the height of their game and one team was being led by their quarterback on what would be a game winning drive and the play went off and the pass was thrown and the touchdown made and the change of the outcome was there but but the play was under review for the line judge had seen an infraction and pulled the flag and upon review they saw that the toe the toe of a wide receiver was just a little bit offside and so that which would have been a win for one team became a loss and that which would have been a loss but for that infraction became a win oh the smallest of words can have the most mind altering change of outcome the wind blew and without it the

Spanish armada would have done their damage but the wind blew and the shores were safe the founding of our own country the winter had come the snow was falling Christmas Eve was here there was no hope in the ranks no pay had been given food was scarce but General George Washington puts a few people on a little skiff and somehow make their way across a Delaware river and into an encampment of the enemy army and they create just enough havoc and then run back on the other side but change the whole outcome of the mindset of a people I remember myself let's get it real walking in my own way doing my own thing resisting not receiving not knowing not welcoming all that

[17 : 34] I had heard about Jesus but a man called me and said will you come to lunch and I did and he drew on a napkin two simple arrows and said this one's heading to hell and that one's heading to heaven and I've known you for three years and let me tell you which line you're on and if you don't repent and turn and walk back to what you know about Jesus it's not going to end well for you son and I heard him on that day but without it but without it where would I be today the world did not know him his own did not receive him but for all who did receive him and if you want to know what reception means

John gives it to you who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God this is my aim for your own heart this morning if you're not a child of God that you would be one and if you assume that you were one you might reconsider that but that even if you have been one for many years you would take great joy in what God has done for you some evidently were ready to receive all that Christmas had to offer some got the gift of Christmas now let's get this straight I know that there are many people even in my family who are great gift givers I'm not one of them I need to be and every year I tell myself

I'm going to be but here we are again the week before Christmas and I've got some work to do because I am not a good gift giver and I love good gift givers I mean you got some of those people in your family maybe you're one of them those who when you get the gift from them and they unwrap it you're like oh my word how did you ever even think of getting that for that person and where in the world did you get it and how long ago was your mind actively working for their welfare on it see all that comes through planning can you just take a look again at that verse verse 12 but to all who did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God I just want to tell you this morning I stood to say that God is the greatest gift giver

God is the one who gave his son that we might be participants in his own family what a gift the gift of Christmas is God's own son the gift of Christmas is that in him you have one who can restore

your relationship to a heavenly father the gift in Christmas according to the text is actually so great that you're actually adopted into a different family now I don't know much about your family but I know that a lot of families you're like when I look at my own family there's not a lot to applaud well then this ought to be unbelievably comforting text you get to be a child of God you get to become adopted into the family of God you get to know God as a heavenly father the way all fathers ought to be it's interesting isn't it this idea children of God aren't we all children of God well in one sense we are if God in the beginning created them male and female and we all descended from them then we are in that sense rightly all children of God but the

Bible also speaks not only about the physical realm but the spiritual realm where we didn't want to be God's children in one sense we wanted to live under our own rule rather than the rule of his patriarchy as it were and so we moved out we left home we went our own way we finally took our own name and in this sense then he says now if you want to come back to God and you'll be his child you actually have to receive his son and in this sense then children of God refer to those who have received according to the text those who receive him those who believe in him to those he gives the right to become children of God now we think of rights in one way but this is really he gives the honor he gives the distinction he gives the privilege he gives us the privilege of being a member of the very family of God as we receive

[23 : 19] God's son it's quite something change will happen in your life as you receive Jesus you know there was a Christmas carol that was written 1860s by a pastor trying to work on his Christmas work a couple weeks ahead of time he wanted to write a carol his name was Phillips Brooks so he starts writing these lyrics for oh little town of Bethlehem how still we see thee lie above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight and he goes on and talks about

Advent but the verse that always comes to me how silently how silently the wondrous gift is given so God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven no ear may hear his coming but in this world of sin where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in where meek souls will receive him still I hold that out to you as you prepare to celebrate Christmas he came the world wasn't ready he came his own family had no welcome but for all who would open the door for meek souls who would receive him who would say

Jesus come into my life begin to rule for I'm the one that left home and I pray that you'll get me home this is good news for those of you who are not yet a Christian it's also good news for those of you who are a Christian there's a sense of being wow I'm home when I look back over the course of my life and the years I've lived Jesus alone is my soul strength Jesus alone is the lover that is able to give me the joys of heaven Jesus alone has been my comfort Jesus has been my light Jesus has brought me out of darkness out of being a child who preferred to do deeds in the darkness and now he actually has put me at his table he's changing my character and he's not bringing me unwillingly I'm willingly being drawn to sort out what my life should look like under his leading and I sit in here this morning and I say how did all this happen how does it happen how did you become a child of God John has a very interesting answer and with this we're almost done he says there at the end verse 13 who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God God does something does something it doesn't happen by blood this this is both difficult news for some and great news for others if you have a wonderful family and you look back on your history and you can recount generation after generation of generation of

Christian men and women if you've got grandparents who went on the mission field or great grandparents who knew Jesus you need to know you're not a child of God through your bloodline wake up salvation comes by faith faith by hearing the word and you have to make it your own but what good news for those who have no history to trace what great news for those who say I don't even know what my great grandparents were but I can tell you Christianity is a brand new thing because I'm the only one in the first one considering it in my line well this is good news because you don't become a child of God by having been born into a good family praise God you become a child of God not by blood not by the will or flesh or effort or work no not by that not by the will of man but God

[28 : 32] I'm going to pray for you today that God will arrive on your doorstep that God will give you faith to open the door to Jesus that God for every child who's already his would say may this season you just dwell in my home may I know nothing but the privilege of sitting in your presence

where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in I invite you to receive Jesus by faith I invite you to take time in these weeks to sit with him to hear from him to praise him our heavenly father on this

Sunday we pray that what we do here would inform what we do for the rest of the week and as we light these candles week by week may they just be a rhythm by way of reminder that we need you in our life and do even for some this morning under the frail preaching of this word a work of faith that would enable them to say yes to you we want to know you we want to receive you we want to believe in you we want to be changed by you we want to be your children rather than masters of our own fate do that for each and every one in Jesus name