

The Word Before Christmas

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[0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, if you'd like to learn a little more about us, you can go to FCCGreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, thank you so much for tuning in to the preaching of God's Word. We are all about getting into this Word, but most of all, letting that Word get into us and truly transform these hearts.

And I know this is going to sound crazy, and I'm going to explain it here in a minute, but the message today is a Christmas message. It's called The Word Before Christmas. It's the first week of our Christmas series called Word Alive, and we're going to be in John chapter 1.

So go ahead and turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of John chapter 1. And I need you to know that there are two different kinds of people in this world. Those who enjoy all the seasons and the holidays throughout the year in their time, and then those who start listening to Christmas music in September, okay?

And I know, I know, some of you are thinking, why in the world are all the church facilities covered in Christmas decorations on November the 16th? Why did people gather a week ago to do that?

[1 : 18] And then there are others of you who were ready to go Christmas caroling two months ago, as you're already done buying Christmas presents, and you've watched Ralphie shoot his eye out three times by now.

And you are pumped to see Christmas permeate this place. Now, I need you to do me a favor. I need you to choose a side. Before you do, let me tell you the sides.

So, are you one, are you the extra early Christmas person, or are you the one who usually waits until after Thanksgiving or even the first week of December to go get the tree?

So here's the thing. Right where you are, unless you're driving, don't do that. But raise your hand if you are my extra excited early Christmas person who's already done with decorations at home, okay?

Anybody there? All right. And where are my after Thanksgiving people who sneer at the too early Christmas people? Now, to the second group, I am sorry.

[2 : 21] I'm profoundly sorry. But I have to share that Christmas is tough for a preacher because you only have about three weeks to expound on such a meaningful time of the year when you factor in the kids program taking up a Sunday.

So this year, we made up our mind to get started a little early so we can dig into one of the deepest passages in all the Bible from the Gospel of John chapter 1.

And while it may not talk about shepherds and angels in the nativity scene like the other Gospels, it absolutely takes us to a Savior who came to set us free.

And trust me, we'll tie in Mary, Joseph, the wise men, the shepherds, and all the other characters that make up this beautiful redemption story. Now, I'm hoping that you're with me here in John chapter 1.

We're probably about four-fifths the way through your Bible. If you start in the New Testament, you have Matthew, Mark, Luke, and then you come to John. And let's read John 1 starting in verse 1 through verse 3.

[3 : 27] Here's what the Word of God says. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through Him, all things were made. Without Him, nothing was made that has been made. May God bless the study of His Word today. So, what's the quick Christmas story that we often hear?

That in the sixth month of Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy with John the Baptist, God sent the angel Gabriel to a modest town called Nazareth. And here, Mary, a virgin, pledged to be wed to

Joseph, has her world turned right side up.

Where this lowly, ordinary, and godly teenage girl is told that she'll have a child by the power of the Holy Spirit, and He will be the Son of the Most High.

For He will be the Savior of the world. For no word from God shall ever fail. And I love Mary's response as we admire her faith. She said, I am the Lord's servant.

[4 : 34] May your word to me be fulfilled. So, from there, she went to visit her pregnant relative Elizabeth. And when she heard Mary's voice, the baby in her womb leapt for joy.

But as she returned home with a baby bump, none of this made sense to Joseph. No way he was buying this story as he felt betrayed by the woman that he loved.

So, being a man of honor, being a man wanting to keep Mary from any public disgrace, he planned to divorce her quietly. Before he could, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and confirmed Mary's account of the Savior that was in her womb that was to be called Jesus.

As Mary was close to having her baby boy, Joseph had to take her with him to register for the census in Bethlehem. And as they entered that town, it was time for the baby to arrive.

But there was no place for them to stay. The inns were all booked up. So, they found themselves in a stinky stable where the Savior of the world was born and placed in a manger.

[5 : 43] Meanwhile, shepherds were in their fields keeping watch over the flocks at night. When their ordinary night became extraordinary, as the angels appeared and directed the forgotten few to where they would look into their Messiah's face.

And oh yeah, the wise men would make a long journey to present their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. This is the story of Jesus.

And yet, I need you to know and I need you to understand something very important that separates Christianity from cults. That distinguishes truth from heresy. This lovable story of Christmas was not the beginning of Jesus because he existed outside of our time and space.

And listen, I get it. This is deep stuff that we're going to talk about over these seven messages that will not only take us through Christmas, but it'll take us to the last Sunday of 2025. This series called Word Alive.

And yes, our human minds have a tough time wrapping around teachings like the Trinity, like the eternal nature of God, like God's justice and grace and how they blend together.

[6 : 53] And yet, we still believe these biblical truths that show us how majestic, powerful, holy, and gracious Jesus really is.

And as we jump into the book of John, we know that this was written by the Apostle John that was often called the disciple that Jesus loved. He was in the inner circle, knowing him as well as anyone on this earth.

Some might even call Jesus his best friend. And we also know that he's the only apostle who was not killed for his faith. He suffered. He was persecuted.

He was exiled for his faith. So trust me, he went through a lot. But as the Holy Spirit inspired him to write these words, he comes right out in the book of John and tells us his purpose.

John 20, 31. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

[7 : 54] So the book of John is a lot different than the other three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which are called the synoptic gospels because they're very similar. But 90%, get that, 90% of what the Holy Spirit led John to share is not in the other gospels.

Where the other three are more narrative-based, story-based, John has one Holy Spirit-led agenda, that you may know Jesus as your Messiah, as your God, and in doing so have life in his name alone.

So church, I am excited for this journey through the first half of John chapter 1, this trip to Christmas, even if you aren't quite ready for all these decorations.

And if you have your outline, and let me just remind you listening on the audio, that you can always go to the YouVersion Bible app, Y-O-U-Version Bible app, under events, under First Christian Church of Greensburg, and you can see that outline.

But let's talk first about this profound truth. Before Christmas, Jesus was God. Let me say that again. Before Christmas, Jesus was God.

[9 : 14] This wasn't his first time on the scene. He is eternal. He exists outside of our time and space. And he starts off this book with a bombshell statement.

I mean, John's not playing around, okay? He's like, dude, we're going to get into this, and we're going to get into it quick. So here's what he says. In the beginning was the Word. The Logos. That's the Word. And if we jump down to verse 14, John tells us what he's talking about when he says the Word. It says, So who is he calling the Word?

Anybody? Jesus, right? Now, to fully get this, you have to understand that John's audience was really diverse. While there would have been Jews in the audience for sure, we see evidence that he was also writing to the Greco-Roman world to make sure they understood the true identity of Jesus. And to the Greeks, they were all about the Word. Logos. All about the Logos, which is where we get the English word logic, or reason, or purpose.

[10:36] They were all about discovering true purpose in this life. And they believed that there was Logos, this impersonal, abstract principle of reason and order in the universe.

There was this creative force, this source of wisdom. And to them, Jesus is meeting them in their current understanding and saying, Okay, you believe in this powerful force, some would call God, but let me take your impersonal understanding and let's make it personal in the person of Jesus. And you know what? This is kind of how I grew up. Maybe you did too. My family believed in a God that was bigger than us, who's ultimately in control. We just didn't understand that he was personal and that we could know him, that we could have a daily walk with him.

I kind of believed in a big guy in the sky who I could impress with my good deeds and my charitable giving and somehow barter with him to get myself into heaven someday.

I didn't realize that his name is Jesus and that my good deeds that I keep trying to use to get myself saved, that they are like filthy rags, the word of God says.

[11:51] And because of my sin, I could never earn my way into God's good graces. And that this God became flesh. He dwelt among us.

He loved us with an everlasting love so much that he gave his sinless, innocent life for my sins. And then on the third day, he rose to show that he truly is God as he conquered the grave and offers us life in his name.

And as we're going to see, guys, in the coming weeks, not only does he save us, but this God wants to transform us into the image of his son as we pursue that purity and that holiness in our relationship with him.

So, can you imagine this person who's always believed in some powerful, impersonal force? Like, honestly, probably a lot of people maybe even listening are.

Can you imagine them reading this book saying, oh, wow, Jesus is the Logos. He is the Word. He is this, what I thought was an impersonal force, but it's him.

[13:03] And he's personal and he's real. And I have his truth in the Word of God. And then if we look at it from another perspective, this was also a powerful statement to the Jew who knew what we call the Old Testament Scriptures.

See, the Word of the Lord, the Word, Logos, of the Lord, was a powerful theme all about God's divine power and wisdom. And by his Word, God introduced this covenant to Abraham in Genesis 15.

By his Word, he gave Israel the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5.5. He revealed God to Samuel in 1 Samuel 3.21. He pronounced judgment on the house of Eli in 1 Kings 2.27.

He counseled Elijah by the Word in 1 Kings 19.9. He was an agent of creation, Psalm 33.6. He revealed Scripture to the prophets, and then there's a whole bunch of references there.

So when the Jew heard that the Word was in the beginning and that Jesus was the Word, man, they had a big decision to make. They knew exactly what that meant.

[14:14] They knew that was claiming that Jesus is God. He is the promised Messiah, the Savior that you've been longing for who has come to set you free.

Now let's focus on those first three words, in the beginning. Now if you've been around the Bible for a minute, when you hear the words, in the beginning, where does that beckon you back to? Where does it take you? Absolutely, Genesis 1.1, right? What's the first verse of the Bible? In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. So, the first three words of John are the same as Genesis.

And here's a cool statement that I once heard Bob Russell, just a very well-known preacher, say years ago. He said, if you can believe Genesis 1.1, you'll have no problem believing the rest of the Bible.

Let me say it again. If you can believe Genesis 1.1, you'll have no problem believing the rest of the Bible. If you believe that in the beginning, God created everything, then there's nothing too big for Him to accomplish in your life when you are fully surrendered to Him.

[15:24] And what do we see throughout the Gospels? Jesus turning water into wine, healing lepers from a disease that would destroy their body from the inside out until they die, taking mud and forming it into the most intricate part of the human body, an eyeball, and it worked perfectly.

Raising a little girl and even Lazarus from the dead. And you know what? His greatest miracle of all, His resurrection to show that He is God and in Him, we can have not only eternal life, but life to the full, F-U-L-L, right now.

And one thing John is making clear, since Jesus is God, that means He is eternal. As hard as it is to wrap my mind around all this, Jesus stood outside of time and space.

He existed eternally before He created everything out of nothing by His supremacy. And listen, I know some of you listening are very familiar with cults that claim that Jesus is not God.

But I'm telling you, if you will pick up the Word of God for yourself, this will quickly fade. And honestly, John does an amazing job of proving Jesus as deity.

[16:42] If you go to John 10, Jesus is in the temple. And the Jews are gathered around Him, and they're asking Him plainly, are you the Messiah? And they're saying that He won't tell them.

And He says, listen, I have told you, but you don't believe Me. And Jesus goes on to say a few more things before He makes this massive statement in John 10.30.

He says, I and the Father are one. And the Jews knew exactly what that meant. And then here's what we pick up in John 10.31. It says, again, His Jewish opponents, so it's not the first time, picked up stones to stone Him.

They're going to kill Him with rocks, okay? But Jesus said to them, verse 32, I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone Me?

So He's like, okay, I've done all these great things from the Father. Why are you going to stone Me? And here's what they say in verse 33. We're not stoning you for any good work, but for blasphemy because you, a mere man, claim to be God.

[17:50] They knew exactly what He was claiming. And that's just one of many examples where Jesus claims to be God. We even see, and I think this is a massive amount of evidence here too, we see different names for God the Father that are also ascribed to Jesus in Scripture that should never be given to a person who's not God, okay?

Here's some of the names that were ascribed to both Jesus and the Father. The Great I Am. Alpha and the Omega. That means beginning and the end. Mighty God.

Everlasting Father. Shepherd. Judge. Light. Savior. Lord of Lords. Redeemer. Listen, the best way to defeat false claims by cults is to know what the Word of God teaches.

And John starts off this incredible book by making it 100% clear Jesus is God. So hear me, church. Christmas is not about a cute baby, but it's about the eternal God stepping into time to bring hope into this world.

Before Christmas, Jesus was God. And listen, He wants to be God. He wants to be first place in your life right now in this Christmas season and beyond.

[19:16] And then let me share one more thing with you. Before Christmas, Jesus was also creator. Creator. So, I'm going to skip over verse 2 for a second here in John 1.

We'll come back to it in a second. But John 1.3 says, Through Him all things were made. Without Him, nothing was made that has been made.

So, while it's hard to wrap our minds around this idea that Jesus is God, that He's eternal, He's always been, even the Trinity that we'll touch on here in a few minutes that boggles all of our minds, it's important that we're good with not being able to easily fathom all this.

Because listen, if the created can completely 100% understand the creator, is He really the creator God of the universe? See, the more I grow in my faith, the better I am with the mysteries.

The better I am with the majesty of my God that I will work a lifetime to understand and still not fully get until I meet Him face to face in eternity.

[20:23] So, I'm okay with these biblical concepts that are hard to grasp with this finite mind. And here we learn that Jesus is the creator of everything.

You know, my wife Bethany and I come from very similar backgrounds and very blue-collar backgrounds and we both grew up in families that did not vacation very often as we had parents

who, listen, were just trying to fight to provide for their kids.

So, when we got married, we decided that if we could afford it, that we wanted to do a good job of doing some vacations that would just be great memories for our kids. Just the past couple weeks, we were blessed to go with a couple families from our church to Gulf Shores, Alabama.

And while it was a little colder than we were hoping for, it was still beautiful to look out on the ocean with the sun coming up, dolphins popping out of the water every morning, knowing that my Savior made all of that.

It's not an accident. Listen, it's not an accident, but it's a thoughtful, intentional, beautiful display of Jesus' power and creativity. See, in Colossians 1, starting in verse 15, it says, the sun is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

[21 : 43] For in him, listen to this, all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. the more science goes, the more we start to know there's an invisible world all around us.

He says, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together.

See, alongside God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, Jesus created everything. Ex nihilo. That's a Latin phrase that means out of nothing.

So when Mary held her baby in her arms that night and she looked into his sweet face, she was holding the one who designed the human body as intricate and complex as it is.

She was looking to the eyes of the one who spoke and creation sprang into existence. Who on the fifth day created the narwhal. That is a species of whale in the Arctic that can have up to a ten foot tusk coming off its head that has purposes that scientists don't even fully understand yet.

[22 : 57] A God who created the leaf bug that completely looks like a leaf to blend in and protect itself while it feeds on leaves. And you know what?

Mary was looking into the eyes. Into the eyes of the one who created her in his own image. the one who created you in your mother's womb with the exact hair color you have, the funny laugh, the quirky sense of humor, your gifts, your passions, your abilities that can be used for his glory.

And I'll tell you, as someone who's always been unique, I have red hair, blue eyes, and freckles.

And by the way, red hair and blue eyes is the rarest combination on earth.

I'll tell you, when I was a kid, my hair is a little bit darker red now, but when I was a kid, it was like bright orange. Every old lady in the grocery store would squeeze my cheeks and I got so tired of it that I would run away from them.

But I'm so thankful that my God is not only this powerful, but he cares for you and me as his creation. He not only could call creation into existence, but he calls you and me by name.

[24 : 10] He knows the amount of hairs on our head, which is easier for some than others, I get it, but he knows your joys. He knows your sorrows. He knows your hurt.

And he meets us, the crown jewel of his creation. He meets us and wants a personal relationship with us.

Not a religious duty, not fear-driven obedience, but he wants an intimate, loving, personal walk with you and me. He wants to meet us in our sin, our disobedience, in our struggles, and lavish his grace upon our lives as we begin that holiness walk with him.

See, when you meet someone who's been a Christian for years and who still lives like the world, it's usually because they don't have a walk with Jesus. They have a walk with religion that doesn't save.

See, that baby Joseph that loved, that baby that Joseph absolutely adored and loved was the great I Am, the creator of the heavens and the earth.

[25 : 15] And another big, I mean, massive theological point here that we at least need to touch on and we could go so much deeper though comes from verse 2. What does John 1-2 say?

He, Jesus, he was with God in the beginning. See, in that koine, that common Greek language that most of the New Testament was written in, this is an astonishing word picture that the English doesn't even do justice.

It also shows that Jesus is God. So the three words in Greek are prosthron. And here's the picture that it paints. God the Father and God the Son, two personal and distinct beings facing one another.

Okay? The Trinity, right? You add the Holy Spirit in there. Facing one another, engaging in intelligent discourse. Isn't that a cool picture? That's what those words mean. That's the picture it's painting that shows that there are two distinct parts of the Godhead. The Trinity with the Holy Spirit as well. Three distinct persons in one God creating everything ex nihilo. [26 : 29] Even in Genesis 1-26, talking about the creation of man. God's Word says this, then God said, and if he's not three in one, then why is he talking to himself?

But anyways, then God said, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness. Who's he talking to? Who's the our? Oh, you are in that passage. It's Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Spirit. And as we start to bring this baby home, one thing you'll learn about me is that you can find people who are much smarter than I theologically, as I've always been, just a very practical person, while also trying to understand the importance of going deeper in the Word. And trust me, you can take Jesus as the eternal God and creator, and you can go much deeper than we did today. We just kind of primed the pump, okay? But my pragmatic side isn't so worried about how fancy you can get on theological concepts. But my question is, how practically are we buying into what we've talked about today? How does that affect our lives? For those of us who've walked with Jesus for years now, do we live in such a way that shows that he is the one and only God of my life?

[27 : 48] Or do I just kind of invite him in when things get bad, or when it's convenient, or just on Sunday morning? Do I walk in his power and his joy every day, knowing that I'm more than a conqueror through Christ Jesus my Lord, the Holy Spirit living inside of me?

Or do I live like my God as this little wimp as I take control of everything? And even this question, do I worship him as the awesome God that he truly is?

And now, for those of you who don't know Jesus, Christmas isn't the beginning of our God. He is the eternal God of all creation who designed you and who loved you with an everlasting love so much that he put on flesh and he dwell among us.

He lived a perfect sinless life, 100% God, 100% man, hard to fathom, teaching us the truth of the kingdom. He was persecuted because he went against the religious agenda.

He was nailed to a cross taking the sins of the world upon his shoulders. So let's get personal. He died for your sins. He died for my sins.

[29 : 02] And today, if you don't know him, I want you to know his arms are open wide to invite you into what John would later call in the book of John, life to the F-U-L-L fool.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for just how you have spoken to us through your word today. May you be honored and glorified with what we do with it.

Thank you that we don't have to buy into cults and all these others who have very selfish agendas to try to pull us away, but that we can believe the gospel that the word of God shares with us and we can know that you, Jesus, are eternal and you are creator, you are a part of the triune God and you are awesome in power and you want to do something awesome in each of our lives.

So thank you for speaking this truth into us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let me share a quick invitation with you. If you are listening and you have questions about God, questions about your faith, questions about what it means to follow Jesus or even our church, you can reach out to us in a couple ways.

Once again, my name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. You can call us at 812-663-8488 or you can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com.

[30 : 25] Hey, God bless you. Hope you have a great week.