

Wreath Making Event

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[0 : 00] They are beautiful, they're a great decoration, I love a good wreath, I've enjoyed making mine. But when did wreaths become a thing? Well I looked up on Google, because Google has the answer to everything, and apparently wreaths have been around in many cultures for many years.

But it was in 16th century Germany when the Lutherans began to incorporate the wreath into this December ritual of Advent. Made in a circle with no beginning and no end, they symbolise the everlasting love of an everlasting God.

And constructed from evergreens, they represent everlasting life. Love and life. They're two things that are really important to us aren't they?

And they're two things that are really hard to find. Everlasting love, everlasting life, precious but hard to find. Well love and life are key things in John's eyewitness account of the life of Jesus. In your bags I think you have a copy of John's Gospel, which is one of the Gospels in the New Testament. Now John would say, yeah it would be great if for a few minutes you could grab these.

[1 : 26] In a little bag. In your bags apparently. If it's not on the floor, under your table, or buried under foliage, it's in your bags.

So do have page 3 open, if you don't mind looking at that. Now John, the person who wrote this Gospel, was a close friend of Jesus.

He's called the disciple Jesus loved. And his Gospel account is one of the most reliable pieces of historical evidence that we have about Jesus.

So bear with me for a few minutes as I show you something of the everlasting love and the eternal life that he offers in the short pages of this book.

So I'm going to read some verses. I don't know if you like me, I can barely read them in the page, it's so tiny isn't it? But it's in the first chapter of this little book on page 3.

[2 : 28] I'm going to read some verses from the beginning. I will skip a few in the middle so I'll try and show you where I am. The sentences very helpfully are numbered. So I'll show you where I'm at.

So let's read. It's titled The Word Became Flesh. And that's the big thing, so that's good. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Skipping to sentence 9. The true light, which gives light to 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.

[3 : 41] 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.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The first Christmas was the most remarkable day in all of history. It was the day that the Creator God revealed himself.

He made himself visible in a way that he had never done before. Throughout all history, God had never been seen.

Not face to face. That was impossible. No one could see God and live. But on that first Christmas, as a light shining in the darkness, God steps into our world and introduces us to himself.

[4 : 58] So look with me at that sentence 14. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. What does that mean? Now, a weird thing in this passage is that the Word is described as a person.

A person who was God. And a person who was with God in the beginning. A God equal person who was born as a man.

And he was there before life began. Because he created everything. Light and dark. Earth and skies. Sea, land and plants. Sun, moon and stars. Fish and birds.

Animals and man. All things were made through him. And without him was not anything made that was made. And yet, this creator, he becomes part of the created world which he made.

The Word became flesh. God became man. And this man is Jesus. So what happens when God enters this world as a man?

[6 : 13] When he dwelt among us? When immortal God meets mortal man? Well, the picture John paints is a picture of light meeting darkness.

Sentence 5 says, The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Sentence 9, And the true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

The light is a picture of Jesus. He is the only son who came from the Father. And the darkness in this world is, The darkness is this world and everyone born into it.

That sounds pessimistic, doesn't it? But as beautiful as this world is, It is also very broken and a very dark place.

Sorrow, sickness and death affect every single one of us. And this is often particularly pertinent to us at Christmas time, isn't it?

[7 : 17] This is when we feel it the most. At some point in each of our lives, we're going to face death. One out of one people who were born into this world ultimately die.

That is the nature of our mortality. And it's the stark reality of the world that we live in. It is a dark place. So how does the light imagery work?

Well, imagine a competition between light and dark. Which one wins? Think about what happens when you walk into a dark room.

You switch the light. And on comes the light. And what happens to the darkness? Disappears, doesn't it? Darkness doesn't overcome light.

Light overcomes darkness. The light wins. The darkness vanishes and you can see clearly.

Similarly, the source of life and light enters this world and he overcomes death.

[8 : 21] Darkness. He overcomes death and darkness. And he brings life and light. Light wins over darkness.

Life wins over death. Jesus wins over death. So as the word becomes flesh, Jesus arrives bringing life and light to a world that is dark and dying.

And then John continues, look again at sentence 14. We have seen his glory. The glory of the only son who came from the father.

Put simply, Jesus makes God seeable and knowable. Jesus makes God seeable and knowable.

When John the writer says, we have seen his glory, he's not speaking about some strange apparition or some made up story. This is his eyewitness account of Jesus.

[9 : 25] Jesus, the God-man, who walked on earth and was seen and heard by hundreds and thousands of witnesses. Jesus has impacted the lives of millions of people throughout history.

Why? Because when people like you and I encounter Jesus, they encounter God. They see his glory.

They see God's godness shining out of someone who looks like any other man. That's what glory literally means. It's a word that means heavy or weighty godness.

The kind of stuff you only find in God. Well, Jesus, who came from God the father, is full of his glory. Jesus is full of godness.

He exudes glorious light and life. And if you and I would keep reading John's gospel, and I recommend you do, you can all take those home, you will see the glory of God shining out of this man, Jesus.

[10 : 37] He's the living water. He's the bread of life. He's the light of the world. He's the good shepherd. He's the resurrection. He's the way.

He's the truth. He's the life. Every divine attribute of the father shines out of the son. In Jesus, God is seeable and knowable.

Jesus is God revealed on earth. So why would Jesus give up a home in heaven? Would you? To become a nomad on earth.

Why give up a splendid throne for a filthy stable? Why exchange supremacy and immortality for humble mortality? Why?

Well, because, finally, from sentence 14, Jesus is full of grace and truth. Grace and truth are found in Jesus.

[11 : 38] Jesus is full of grace. The truth is that God knows and loves his world. And he knows and cares about you and me. And he longs for us to know him as our father.

He longs for us to be his children. And he longs to welcome us into his generous, open arms as his very own. He longs for us to be with him face to face forever.

The problem is we don't want to know God. Many of us prefer not to consider God at all. We find ways to hide. We find other explanations for this phenomenal world that we live in.

But we just try to avoid thinking about life and death. And we're just too busy making our own life for ourselves. It's busy, isn't it? Well, that's what sentence 10 is talking about.

He was in the world and the world was made through him yet the world did not know him. When Jesus came into this world he was not recognised and he was not welcomed.

[12 : 54] And for many people Jesus is no more than a swear word. We curse God's only son. the one he sent to give us life.

Sentence 11 says he came to his own and his own people did not receive him. In fact, his own people so hated him that they lied and connived to have him slaughtered, crucified on a cross. But the world's attempt to snuff out the light and to kill the source of life is all part of God's plan. God's gracious plan to love and bring life to this dark world.

John later tells us that God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. When God sent Jesus into the world he didn't send him to condemn the world as much as we deserve it but instead to offer life, life eternal and life to the full.

[14 : 20] This is grace and truth and it all started at Christmas. But this is not the whole story and this is not the end of the story. A day is coming and whether we believe it or not we will all meet our maker face to face and there will be nowhere to hide.

Those who receive and believe in Jesus will be welcomed into the Father's loving open arms. But those who don't will be completely alone.

They will be told I never knew you. I never knew you. Now if these words are true we need to take them seriously.

So where do we go from here? Well there are a few things that will help you take the next steps if you'd like to. The rest of John's account gives a much clearer and fuller picture of Jesus' life.

Take your copy home and read it over Christmas perhaps the friend who brought to you this evening or invited you will read this with you and they'll be able to explain the bits that don't make sense and they'll tell you there are bits in there that still don't make sense to me and that's great because God is God and we are small and there's lots to keep learning and growing in our understanding.

[15 : 44] So ask for help. Ask your friend to explain the hard bits that don't make sense. Give them all your difficult questions. Ask God to help you see more clearly. I know Grace Church have a number of Christmas services coming up.

The flyers are also in your bag. I think they're green. Don't mix it up with the leaves and the bones. Put the dates in your diary. I'm sure Katie will tell us more about that.

And if you'd like to do come speak to me this evening if you have any questions, if I've said anything that you'd like to know more about or if you'd like me to pray with you I'd be very happy to do that.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.