

Wreathmaking Event

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Date: 27 November 2024

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[0 : 00] The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

So I mentioned what I think is at the heart of Christmas as a Christian, and I don't know what you think of when you think of Christian Christmas. Maybe it's the classic Christmas card of a rosy-cheeked baby nestled in a manger, or maybe it's the angelic sound of choristers from King's College, Cambridge, broadcast by the BBC.

Or maybe it's going to see your daughter or niece or granddaughter perform as Mary in the school nativity. That was never me, by the way. It was my sister. I was the angel. It's fine. I'm over it. But as a Christian, Christmas is rightly focused on the birth of Jesus. And whilst that is an awesome event, it's only an awesome event because of what it sets in motion, what it signals.

[1 : 21] Because that tiny baby in the manger grew up to be a man that literally split time in two by his birth that first Christmas. Now the tiny section of the Bible that we just had read to us tonight is from one of the four historic eyewitness accounts in the Bible.

We call them the Gospels. And this one is written by a man called John, who was with Jesus throughout all of his ministry on earth. And as we look at it, I hope that we'll see that Jesus' coming was a great revelation.

Jesus' coming revealed God. Jesus' coming revealed our hearts. And Jesus' coming revealed an opportunity for a relationship. And we're going to think about each of those three things for a few minutes now.

So Jesus' coming revealed God. Did you see that down in the verse 9? So kind of back the two pages right at the bottom. It says, The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

Jesus is the true light and he gives light to everyone. Light illuminates, it reveals. And it's binary, isn't it? If we can see, if the light is on, then everyone can see it.

[2 : 38] And I don't know if you watch Strictly. You might be aware that they have their first blind contestant on this year.

And when I think of Strictly, some of the moves that I see on there, I think I couldn't do with perfect sight. So it's amazing that Chris McCausland can do it while it's completely in the dark. Recently, he performed what they called a blackout dance, where halfway through the lights went off.

And him and his partner, Chris and Diane, were obviously nowhere to be seen. And it gave us a little snapshot of what life is like all the time for Chris, completely in the dark.

So the contrast is clear. As people who can see, as people who have sight, when the lights were on, we could see them perfectly. But when the lights went off, we couldn't.

We depend on light to see. Now, just prior to the verses, if we'd read what went before, John tells us that the people were in the dark.

[3 : 40] And Jesus shone into that darkness. You see, we're naturally in the dark about what God is like. And the only way we can know what he's like is if he chooses to reveal himself to us.

So unlike the idea of Father Christmas, who comes secretly in the night and refuses to reveal himself to children, God the Father chose to reveal himself to us through the person of Jesus.

Now, before Jesus came, there was no way for people to fully understand what God was like. They were in the dark. But just as the singer Tom Grennan, when he flicked the switch and 300,000, I think, lights went on in Oxford Street, the lights shone when Jesus came into the world.

Jesus gives light because he perfectly reveals the Father to us. And Jesus can fully reveal the Father to us because he is God. So elsewhere in the Bible, Jesus is described as the image of God and the exact representation of his being.

And just before the words that we read, John describes Jesus as the word of God. So if we want to know what Jesus is like, I'm sorry, what God is like, we can look at Jesus.

[4 : 59] The man who, not the baby in the manger, but the man who grew up and had showed us that he has power over nature. Sickness, evil and death.

The man who treated people with compassion and who exacted perfect justice. When he shone into the darkness, he showed us what God is really like.

Generous, loving and good. So Jesus is coming shows us what God is like. And secondly, Jesus is coming reveals our hearts.

And we see that by how people respond to Jesus. You see, our reaction to him matters. If you look down at verse 10, it says, He, Jesus, was in the world.

And though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize 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.

[5 : 59] So there were two responses to Jesus when he came. He was rejected or he was received. God, in human form, came to the world that he had made.

But the world didn't recognize Jesus. And even the Jewish people, those who were waiting for God's promised saviour and king, even they did not accept him.

That's who John's referring to when he says Jesus is own in verse 11. Now, it's easy to skate over that. But imagine we were traveling home for Christmas one year to be with family.

And the words of the famous Christmas song, we're driving home for Christmas. But when we get there, no one answers the door and we're left out in the cold while all our family parties and sighs. Well, that is just a tiny glimpse of the rejection that is pictured here. Where as the creator of the world, the one we owe an allegiance to, comes to the world he made.

[7 : 07] I guess the modern day equivalent would be cancelling someone. Well, the Bible tells us that naturally we all cancel Jesus from our lives, at least. And perhaps Christmas is a microcosm of how we do that.

Indulging ourselves on all the good things that God gives us. But ignoring the one who gives us those things and whose birth we should be celebrating. But some received Jesus.

I don't know whether you spotted that down in verse two. Sorry, verse 12. To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

So some received Jesus. They accepted him and they believed in his name. Now the name Jesus means the Lord is salvation or God saves.

So far from cancelling Jesus or shutting him out in the cold, this second group of people accepted God's salvation, his rescue. So Jesus' coming reveals God.

[8 : 13] It reveals our hearts by the way we respond to him. And finally, he also reveals the opportunity of a relationship. Let me read these verses again.

To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. See, that was why Jesus entered the world that first Christmas.

God longs to have a relationship with us. And when we receive him, God himself, the creator and sustainer of the universe, we have the opportunity and privilege, the right to become children of God.

We're adopted into his family. And along with that come all the privileges of being family. I think sometimes we can think that Christianity or being a Christian is a burden.

We think it's all about rules and curtailing fun. Maybe God's a bit of a grinch. But actually, Christianity is the opposite. It's all about relationship.

[9 : 20] Just like a good father, God longs to have a relationship with us. So much so that he sent Jesus to earth that first Christmas. To pay the penalty we deserve for shutting him out in the cold.

And that sacrifice of his life also won the right for us to be called children of God. For those who receive him. So far better than the best father, God sees our character, warts and all.

And responded by sending Jesus. Not despite that, but because of it. By his death on the cross, Jesus won the right for those who receive him to have a relationship with God.

Now, I realise for some of us here, maybe our experience of family isn't positive. But I hope we can all see the potential positives that there are in family.

As I mentioned, I used to teach children in care. And they longed for the things that family can provide, love and security. And when a child is adopted, they have all the rights of a biological child.

[10 : 33] The child is treated in the same way. They have the same privileges, the same inheritance, the same right to love and care. And that is what's on offer here.

When we recognise who Jesus is, all those rights become ours with God the Father. We have access to him. We have a right to his love. We'll inherit what is his.

When we receive Jesus, we have the promise of eternal life with God. And all the good things he gives us. It'll be a bit like Christmas every day. As John goes on to say, we don't get those privileges through being born into the right family or being baptised.

It doesn't matter what our parents believe. We don't have the right to become children of God because of what we do. It's not about trying hard or being kind or going to church or giving to charity. None of those things will give us a right to become a child of God.

They're all burdens. All that we need to do is receive the baby in the manger. As our creator and as our Lord. It's quite a strange concept, isn't it, to say we're receiving a person.

[11 : 44] But it's a bit like a present. When someone gives us a gift at Christmas, we have a choice, don't we? We can choose to leave it under the tree and reject that gift. Or we can take it.

We can accept it. We can maybe investigate it by giving a bit of a shake. We can engage with it by opening it and having a look at what's inside. And it's the same with Jesus.

We can choose to leave him under the tree at Christmas. Or we can choose to investigate him, to engage with him. We can choose to receive him. All right. Let's pray. All right.