

Nativity Service Talk

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[0 : 00] 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.

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.

He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

[1 : 17] 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.

Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Amen. Amen. Well, good afternoon. It's great to see so many faces. I'm just going to chat to you just for a few moments to talk about the true meaning of Christmas.

[2 : 31] For those of you who haven't met me, my name is Glenn Burns. And as John said, I am the Assistant Minister at St. Bottles in this city. Now, I just want to think about what is Christmas all about?

Now, I don't know about you, but I love Christmas. I love everything about Christmas, and one thing I love in particular about Christmas is when the Christmas ads come on the telly.

You know what I'm talking about? I'm talking about when Sainsbury's recreate the football match between Germany and the Brits in No Man's Land on Christmas Day. I'm talking about when Coca-Cola rolls out the big holiday truck.

And I'm talking about when John Lewis brings out an ad each year, and you're left scratching your head afterwards thinking, what on earth is that all about? Do you know what I'm talking about? Now, the ad that got me really thinking, what in particular was the ad for Tesco's?

The tagline that Tesco's are using this year is this. Helping feed your Christmas spirit. But the question I have for you guys is, what is it that really feeds your Christmas spirit?

[3 : 34] Now, it might be when you first hear Michael Bublé or Michael Bubbles and Mariah Carey on Spotify. It might be that Christmas movie you watch each year, whether it's Muppet's Christmas Carol, The Holiday, or the most Christmassy film of them all.

Now, picture this. The hero comes from the sky down to earth to rescue Christmas from the enemy and to save his family, his loved ones.

And it's all set at Nakatomi Plaza. You know what I'm talking about. The best Christmas film of all time, Die Hard. Isn't it? Or it might be the smell of pine and cinnamon as you fill your home, that fills your home as the decorations go up and you're sipping a glass of Bailey's by the open fire, stuffing your face full of celebrations.

Whatever it is that helps you feed that Christmas spirit. But here's the thing. We love Christmas, don't we? But Christmas will sadly come to an end.

It won't leave you completely satisfied. The decorations will come down. The presents will all be opened and be set in the corner, forgotten about. We'll stop singing Shaken Stephen songs and we'll say goodbye to Buddy the Elf and Macaulay Culkin for another year.

[4 : 57] And the question remains at that. What can really feed your Christmas spirit? Can we know the true spirit of Christmas that will be with us forever?

Well, in John's gospel, we discover that the true meaning of Christmas is all about God coming to us so that we can know him and live with him forever.

But the amazing thing about this, and we've read this in John's gospel, is that God himself makes the first move to come and dwell among us so that we can know him.

And if there's one thing I want you to take away this morning, it's this. The God who made us became one of us so that we can believe and find life in him forever.

And we're going to be thinking about this sentence and see how it's the only thing that can truly feed our Christmas spirit today. Now I'm going to be working through John chapter one here.

[6 : 01] You might want to have it open with you. It's on Patreon. I'm just going to use this booklet because I find it handy. And we'll first think about that first part of that sentence, the God who made us.

Now to change gears a little bit, we're going to go back in time. You might need to use your imaginations for this. And imagine with me some Greek philosophers sitting around in their togas, obviously not on a day like this, it's a bit foundered, and they're pondering what the meaning of life might be.

They know this as the logos. And as these academics question each other, challenge each other, they're asking each other what the meaning of life is. The gospel writer John takes this idea and he shows us this.

The logos, the word, he isn't a rationale or an idea, but the logos is a person. And this person, this logos or this word, is someone who John really wants us to know.

Take your booklet, John booklets, turn to page three with me. And it says this in John chapter one. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.

[7 : 13] He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything that was made. Now I wonder if you've ever went for a walk, maybe in the countryside, and you've been just absolutely amazed at the beauty of nature.

Or it doesn't have to be even if you go for a walk, even just look up at night time. Now I know this is pretty difficult here in London, but maybe in the quaint village of Dulwich within this metropolis that we live in, maybe you're able to do this.

You look up at the night sky, and you see the vast array of the constellations and the stars. They stretch for billions and billions of light years. Now everything, from a star to the smallest hummingbird, they were all made with purpose.

They were all made with a reason. You see, everything in creation is a mirror of the glory and beauty of God. And John tells us that the God who made all things in the very beginning was the Word.

But the Word is more than just God. If you've seen there in your booklets in John chapter 1, the Word also stands beside God. He is with God.

[8 : 36] And there's a bit of mystery used in that language there. But it helps us to see that the Word is the same as God. He is equal, yet different.

And everything was made through the Word, through Him, including us. And in fact, this is something special in itself.

Because not only did the Word make us, but He made us unique from the rest of creation. Because back in Genesis, God says these words, let us make mankind in our image.

You see, even then, God is speaking as if there is more than just Himself there. There is someone else there speaking as well as Him. And John is telling us, this is the Word.

The Word made all things. He made us in His image. And He gave us life. This life, where we seek to understand the reason, the meaning of life, the point of it all, is all found back in Him.

[9 : 48] The author, the creator, the one in who we find our purpose. And the one who made us then, according to John, became one of us.

So the God who made us became one of us. Now, I don't know if you've ever had that starstruck feeling where you've met someone famous.

Let me tell you what happened when it happened to me. This is 2011, so we're talking, what, 13 years ago? And I was in a completely different job.

I was working in music at that time. And I found myself working on a music video. And when I arrived on the set, I had no idea who it was for. I was told one thing by my boss. Can you meet me at 6 a.m. in the morning outside the studio because we're going to go to a field. And I thought, okay. So we went to the field. And we all speculated who it was.

[10:47] We had no idea who it was. But after several hours of guessing, we found out who this person was. Does anyone have an idea who it was?

Any ideas? Well, let me put you out of your misery. We were working on the music video for Rihanna. Okay. In a field in Northern Ireland.

Does that sound unbelievable? Of course it does. But it happened. I know the weirder thing was. This was just at the height of her fame as well.

She had just done Umbrella. She was recording the video for We Find Love. And let's be honest, the song goes, We Find Love in a hopeless place. And there's no more hopeless place in Northern Ireland.

But all of us were starstruck at this A-list Hollywood actress stroke music superstar standing in the field with us. And we were all standing there thinking, what on earth are you doing here?

[11:47] Now, it's one thing to be standing in front of a major celebrity. Whether you sit beside them on a tube or if you walk past them in the street in London. I found out just yesterday that Hugh Grant loves to sit in Pret in West London and people just look at him all the time and go, you know.

But imagine standing before God. Imagine eating a meal with God. Imagine walking down the street and bumping into God in Pret or casually sitting down beside him on a park bench.

Now, I wonder if anyone ever imagined that they were able to come face to face with God and yet in John's gospel we see something amazing happening here.

God became one of us. Listen again to what John says in verse 14. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Now, the word who is both God and with God he became flesh and he was with us. In other words God became a human being.

[13:00] But he didn't stop being God in order to do so. John goes on to say this in verse 14. And we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only son from the father full of grace and truth.

See, God came into this world as his son, Jesus Christ. And as Jesus entered this world, he entered humbly into this world.

Now, what we see here in God's word is that there's no stretch limo, there's no entourage, there's no bodyguards, there's no privilege or status.

us. But Jesus enters this world born as a baby into an ordinary family. A family whose lineage would prove one thing, that the promises of God would come true.

You see, that child would come and his name would be Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Jesus, the son of God, the one who is described as the word in verses one to three, the one who made us in his image, takes on our image as he becomes one of us, fully human and yet fully God at the same time.

[14:26] And yet, although John and many others have seen his glory, it wasn't like a celebrity starstruck moment for them at the time. You see, they didn't really know who he was. In fact, many people didn't.

And if people knew who he was, then it would have been a really big deal. But John says this in verses 10 to 11. 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. And so the question remains, though, why did Jesus come to earth? What is the point of Christmas?

Well, see, back in verse John, John explains to us why. Because in verse 4, in him was life, and that life was the light of men. If you were to keep reading this, you would see in chapter 3 that John explains the problem for that life, or the problem that we have, is not the light and the life that Jesus brings, but the problem is that we have rejected that, because we love darkness.

And the reason that we love darkness is because of our willful rejection of God, just like God's own people. Now, some of you are thinking, that's not me.

[15:49] I'm a decent person. And that may be true, but you all know very well it doesn't take much for us to reveal the hate within our hearts, does it?

If you don't believe me, I dare you to go and take the tube at rush hour and see how patient you are as a human being. I dare you to go for a walk this afternoon in Oxford Street in the middle of the crowds and see how long it is before you get annoyed at somebody.

You see, the reality is we all have hateful hearts. And it's not that that hate comes into our life through the circumstances around us, but it's the circumstances reveal the hate that's in us from the very beginning.

And all we need is a little push, a little shake, don't we? We all get angry. And it's not just anger that comes out of us.

It's lust, it's greed, it's many other things that come from within us. All these unhealthy habits, which the Bible calls sin. And that sin leads to us being caught in the darkness and being separated from God where there is no life.

[17:06] But instead of us trying to work our way towards God, the Bible tells us God comes to us in Jesus. The word who made us became one of us so that we can believe and find life in him forever.

believe is a really funny word for us today because we usually associate it in one of two ways.

Either we believe in something cryptic or the other struggle to believe in.

Whether it's in legendary creatures, like some people say, I believe in the Loch Ness monster because I saw it with my own eyes, or I believe in Bigfoot because I saw a big hairy man the other day, or you might have the kind of more crazy conspiracy theories.

I believe man didn't walk on the moon. I believe that Britney Spears is actually a fake. It's an actress. It's not actually her. And other things.

I don't believe in those things. But belief isn't like those things. And it's also not willing to be something true either. I don't know if you've seen Elf. One of my favourite Christmas memories is walking through Ikea on the run up to Christmas and they're playing Elf in one of the living rooms with Swedish subtitles.

[18:25] Amazing. But there's that scene in Elf where Santa's sleigh breaks down. And he tells Buddy it's because there's not enough Christmas spirit because kids don't believe in Santa anymore.

Aww. No? Alright. But if more kids believe that there's enough Christmas spirit and Christmas will be saved.

Now the Bible doesn't talk about belief in either of those ways. It doesn't talk about belief in a legend or some sort of crazy theory. And it doesn't talk about belief in a will.

Something that you desire to happen. Because in the past God's promises were to point towards the coming of his son Jesus.

He asked his people to believe or trust in him and his word. and John writes this book for us so that he can help us to believe through the evidence of who Jesus is.

[19:31] That Jesus is the son of God who came to this earth and this is known through the evidence of those who have seen him and believe that those promises have come true.

So the Bible talks about belief through evidence and promises that are fulfilled. But why is that so important?

What does it matter if we believe or not? I mean what is it for me if I believe? Well here's what's in it for you guys.

Jesus came at Christmas time so that we can not only believe him and know him but also find eternal life in him. You see with Jesus the spirit of Christmas can truly last forever once you understand what the spirit of Christmas really is all about.

It is God and man dwelling together. John puts it this way in verse 12 he says this but to all he did receive him who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God.

[20:47] Now the problem that separates us and God as I've mentioned is sin that is dealt with by Jesus. He did this by giving his life on the cross in exchange to give us life.

You can read that here in John's gospel but there's much more than that. If you believe in him if you believe in Jesus look at what it says again verse 12 he gives the right for you to become a child of God and in a world striving to find meaning and identity and understanding there's an amazing sense of peace there in finding out that we don't have to do anything to gain that meaning we just need to believe in the one who has done it all for us.

Why? Because you were made to know your God and in Jesus you can do just that here today. Jesus is not some ethereal being he isn't a spirit or a ghost or a mystical entity. Jesus as God walked on this earth he lived amongst people like you and me. he gave his life for us so that we could know him.

And you see those who believe are given the promise and hope of eternal life. Now just imagine that for a moment. Imagine if that feeling of Christmas never went away.

[22 : 21] Imagine if you woke up tomorrow and felt that joy deep down in your hearts to know that we are fully spiritually fed because of the life that Jesus gives us.

A life to the full that dwells deep in our hearts and offers us the promise of being with him forever. forever. So I hope you have a very merry Christmas.

I hope that you know that nothing can give you more joy or satisfaction than knowing Jesus. The son of God who came to dwell with us at Christmas and can give you life so the spirit of Christmas can dwell with you for all eternity.

If you want to find out more about that, if you want to find out more about who Jesus is, then can I encourage you to read this more, to find out more about who this Jesus is.

Follow the notes that come alongside it. Read John's Gospel. It's only going to take you what? An hour? Two hours? I mean, what are you going to do over Christmas? You've got that lull between Christmas Day and New Year's Day when you don't know what day is which.

[23 : 31] Read John's Gospel. It'll change your life forever and it'll help you to know who Jesus really is.