

Wisdom

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Preacher: Simon Dowdy

[0:00] May I add my welcome to Simon's. My name is Andy Meadows. I'm the Youth and Children's Minister here at Grace Church. It's great to see you all. We're going to have our first reading from the Bible and Ava is going to come and read for us.

No, she's not. Tim is going to come and read for us. It's John chapter 1, verses 1 to 5. 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 men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

Brilliant. Thanks, Tim. Now, you may have been, when you were invited here this afternoon, you may have thought, they said, come to a Christingle service.

And people thought, what is a Christingle? That's a very good question, and it's a question we're going to answer this afternoon, because the Christingle explains to us the message of Christmas.

[1:16] And it tells us what the Christian faith is all about. Now, who can tell me what the first thing on a Christingle is? It's round. That's a clue.

Go on, Rory. It's an orange. Okay, it's an orange. I've got an orange here. Can you see that at the back? That is a bit small.

I need a bigger orange. If anyone have a look, if you see something big and round, an orange, around that, that would be fantastic. Anything we can use for an orange?

Wow. Okay. What are the chances?

That is just our day, really. How about we use this? We have a large Christingle here. We don't need that anymore.

[2:17] We have an orange. Now, who can tell me what the orange on a Christingle represents? What is it about, Lucy? The world.

The big orange is the big world. And who knows, the next part of the Christingle, something that goes in the orange.

Sweets. Fantastic. Right. We're going to need some volunteer to stab some sweets onto our Christingle. Look at you.

We'll put your hands up. That's outrageous. I think we probably won't go for that. Just for safety.

What we're going to do, we're going to give him some sweets.

So we have our orange and we have our sweets. Who knows what the sweets represent? Go on.

Have a go. Food. Yeah, food. God's gift to us all year round.

[3:18] Now, I think the first part of the Christingle is an orange. Our world. Our world. And lots of things that God gives us all year round.

The Bible's big claim, Christianity's big claim, is that God made everything. That God made everything. Everything that we can see, touch, taste.

All comes from God. And take up your service sheet again and look at the little one. Of the first reading. The first verse. It says this.

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. John writes a biography of Jesus' life. And he starts by saying, talking about this person called the Word.

[4:19] In our third reading, it's spelled out that this person, the Word, is actually Jesus. But we'll come to that. But John is retelling the story of creation with Jesus at the centre.

Now sometimes my words are quite powerful. I've made people laugh with my words. Not on purpose sometimes. I've made people cry with my words.

I've made a marriage through my words. But what I haven't done is made a tree through my words. I haven't put stars in the sky.

I didn't turn on the sun. But actually that's what God did. Because through speaking, God made everything.

Mount Everest. All the billions and billions of stars. He switched on the sun. Those words again. Through him all things were made.

[5 : 19] Without him nothing was made that has been made. And if God made everything, that means us as well. Everyone have a look at your hands.

Wiggle your fingers. Wiggle your fingers. Did you know there are 34 muscles which move the fingers and thumb? 34. Those nerves and tendons receive messages from the brain to help us use our hands.

Our bodies are amazing. Our world is amazing. And the claim and the Bible makes is that God made it all. Through his words.

And John also says in verse 4 of our reading. Have a look down. In him was life. In him was life. In other words, living with God in charge is the right way to live.

Because he made everything. But it's also the best way to live. Because he is our loving creator. Who gives us good gifts to enjoy all year round.

[6 : 24] Sport. Families. Friends. Brussels sprouts. All good gifts to us year round. And that's why we have the sweets on the Christingle.

God provides for us throughout the four seasons. Because he loves us. For the grown-ups among us. These opening verses of John's Gospel aim to give us a bigger view of that baby in the manger. He is the very word of God. What Jesus says is what God says. He has existed eternally. Equal to God. And through him everything was made. Now we don't fully understand the mechanics of that. How that happened. But at least it should challenge our thinking.

To who we think Jesus actually is. You see John doesn't want us to think of Jesus as a tiny vulnerable baby. But instead to think of him as the powerful creator God himself.

[7 : 32] John wants us to grasp that on that first Christmas night. The God who made the stars. Slept under the stars. As a baby.

So that's the first part of our Christingle. We have the orange. We have our world. We have our sweets. God's good gifts to us. And we'll come to the next part in a minute.

We're going to have our second reading now. And George is going to come up and read to us. The true light that gives the light to every man was coming into the world.

He was in the world. And through 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.

Brilliant. Thanks George. Fantastic. So on our Christingle we have our orange. Representing that God made everything.

[8 : 32] There's nothing that was made without him. And then we have God's good gifts to us all year round. That's why we have sweets on a Christingle. That God is not just in charge.

He's the loving God in charge. He gives gifts to us. Now who knows what goes next on a Christingle? What goes inside? Go on Elspeth.

A candle. Okay. Now I think I've got a candle. But it's quite small. Shall we get the large Christingle out? Great. Out you come. So remind me again what goes on the top.

A candle. A candle. Great. So I'm going to pop a little wick. There we go like that. A candle. Volunteer. Volunteer.

Again. Again. I have words. I have words. Now I think we've thought long and hard about this. We risk assessed. We thought a head torch might be better. So I'm going to pop that on.

[9 : 36] There we go. Look at that. Now we have the light on the top of our Christingle. Fantastic. That's it for now. Thank you very much.

Watch yourself. Lovely. Great. Now does anyone know what the candle represents?

Light. It does represent light. Because God made light come into the world and creation. He made the stars. He made the sun.

And the Bible says there was another time when God sent light into the world. And that's Jesus. He's God's light that came into the world.

And that's why we have a candle on our Christingle. To represent Jesus. Jesus. And Jesus the light is spoken about in verse 9 of our second reading. So grab it up again.

[10 : 34] Have a look down. Have a look down at verse 9. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world.

And then 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. Normally people like looking at lights at Christmas. Maybe you've seen the lights or the houses decorated around your road. Inside your house on your Christmas tree if you have it up yet. Or Oxford Street or something like that.

But when it comes to God's light, Jesus, the reaction is very different. Now imagine it's Christmas day.

You're quite excited. You've got family coming around. Okay. Aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents. The whole shebang. The emergency chairs are out. The whole lot are there.

[11 : 31] And they arrive and you open the door. They smile and they say Merry Christmas. But instead of welcoming them and giving them a glass of sherry or something like that.

You say, who are you? And you slam the door in their face. And they're left there on the doorstep. That would be an absolutely shocking thing to do.

To those who are your own. Well, these verses tell us that is how the world treats Jesus. And when Jesus stepped into the world on that first Christmas, he should have been welcomed with open arms.

This is God himself. This is God himself. Through him, everything was made. But he wasn't recognized or received.

Instead, he was rejected. And that rejection continues in our world today. You see, just like in our example of slamming the door in your family's face when they visit.

[12 : 36] The world slams the door in Jesus' face. We naturally don't want him in charge of us. Because we want to run our own lives.

I want to decide my life. We might not say that out loud. But the way the world is shows that to be true.

And the Bible's word for this is sin. And by treating God in this way, Jesus says elsewhere in the Bible that we do deserve God's fair punishment. And now for the grown-ups among us, you may think talk of sin is scaremongering.

Now that's a buzzword going around at the moment. It's scaremongering. But it really does explain why the world is the way it is. It's why Christmas is actually quite stressful.

Because family relationships are hard. We know that. It's why there is war. Greed. Office politics.

[13 : 40] And these are all symptoms that point to our big problem. That the world has slammed the door in Jesus' face. We don't want him in charge. We shut him out of our lives.

That's the bad news that the Christingle points to. But the great news is to come. Because Jesus came into the world to fix our biggest problem. And more about that later on in the service.

So we've got our orange reminding us God made everything throughout his world. And that he's a good God who gives us good gifts to enjoy all year round. So we have our sweets.

And then we have our candle to represent Jesus. God's light who came into the world. But actually he's not welcomed or received. He's rejected. And so who knows what the last part of the Christingle is.

Someone else? George? Yeah. Electrical tape. Yeah. Well done. Thinking. And I think we need our big Christingle out. Here he is.

[14 : 47] So somehow we've got to cover this Christingle in red tape. Who? A couple of volunteers who are slightly older. Elspeth and Rory.

Thank you. We need to get. Hello. We need to get this round him. So Rory you hold that. You hold in there. And Elspeth you just try and walk it around.

About you know 15 times or something. No maybe just a couple of times. Ready off you go. Let's get it round. Is he going to burst? That would be fun wouldn't it?

That's not on the risk assessment. Right. Are we there? Are we nearly there? I backed you guys. I backed you. Okay. We have a red tape kind of. I think that's fine.

I think that is fine. Thank you very much Rory. Great. So. So. We have the world that God made. We have his sweets.

[15 : 45] We have the lights. And we have the red ribbon that goes round the Christingle. Who knows what that ribbon represents. That red tape. Oh.

That's a harder one this one. Go on. Jesus blood. That is correct. That is right. Because Jesus died on the cross didn't he?

And that's what we're going to think about now. So thank you very much Mr. Christingle. Now the red ribbon reminds us doesn't it? That the Christingle points not just to Christmas.

But beyond it. And John does that as well. He tells us all about Jesus' life. And he doesn't just tell us about how it started. But how it ended as well.

Because John goes on to tell us that Jesus grew up. He lived a perfect life. And he loves us so much that he died on the cross.

[16:42] And to take God's punishment we deserve. In our third reading. It tells us what Jesus' death achieved for us. Have a look down in verse 12.

Yet to all who did receive him. To those who believed in his name. He gave the right to become children of God. You see when we understand that we have slammed the door.

In God's face. And when we ask for forgiveness. We are forgiven. And we are welcomed into God's family. That's what it means to receive Jesus.

And to believe in his name. To ask God for forgiveness. Trusting that Jesus died. To take the punishment. Instead of us. Now verse 13 spells out.

That being in God's family. Doesn't happen automatically. It doesn't happen naturally. Have a look down at verse 13. Children born not of natural descent.

[17:44] Nor of human decision. Or a husband's will. But born of God's. You see being welcomed into God's family. Is not about being born to the right parents.

And not about being clever enough. To work it out. Or by being good enough. On our own. You see lots of people tend to think.

Getting to God is like a ladder. That we have here at the bottom. And God is at the top. And somehow we've got to get to the top.

And how are we going to do it? Well some people think. Well it's by. Being kind. And we do that. Then give to charity.

And even. Things like go to church. And life is like one big ladder. Trying to work our way up. To God. And whilst these are good things to do.

[18:43] Verse 13 is saying. That being welcomed into God's family. Is not down to us. But completely down to God. His gift of Jesus.

Dying on a cross. For us. And by trusting in his death. We are welcomed into God's family. He is the only way. Up the.

To God. And by trusting in his death for us. We are welcomed in. In God's family. Great. Let's get him out one last time. Out you come.

We'll do a big summary. So. Oh wow. Look. So God made the world. He's a good God.

Who gives us good gifts. And yet he sent his light. Jesus into the world. And how has he received. Well he's rejected. The door is slammed in his face.

[19:45] And that rejection continues today. But God in his love. Gives us the gift of Jesus. Who dies on the cross for us. To take the punishment we deserve. And if we trust in that for ourselves.

Then we are welcomed. Into God's family. That's the message. Of the Christingle. And that's the message of the Christian faith. Really. So thank you very much.

You've been a great help this afternoon. Everyone wave. I said by last time. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Now as we close. As we close. When we open Christmas presents. I think there are three types of presents.

That bring three reactions. Firstly. There's the. What on earth am I going to do with this present. I don't need it. I don't even know what it is.

[20:41] It's neglected. Under the wrapping. And quickly re-gifted. In January. Then there's the present. That is nice. But it's not going to change your life.

A nice bottle of wine. Or a toy. That gets some attention. But by January. It's forgotten. Then there's the present. That is just.

What you needed. The present that sparks joy. And happiness. Hugs. And cheers. And tears. A new bike. Or a house deposit. Something like that.

You can tell what I'm. Hoping for. But when we understand. The message. Of the Christingle. We will see God's gift.

Of Jesus. As the present. That we all really. Need. That will bring great. Joy. Hugs. And tears.
[21 : 36] And cheers. Complete forgiveness. And being welcomed in. With open arms. Into God's
family. Forever. Let's pray together. Dear God.

We thank you for Christmas. We thank you for the gift of Jesus. Who stepped into our world. Even
though he was rejected. Loved us so much. He would die for us on the cross. And we thank you.
For that great gift. Of being in your family. When we turn to you. Amen. Amen.