

The Arrival of the King - who makes God known

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Well, please do turn in your Bibles back to John's Gospel, page 1062. I don't know if you realise it's 23 days until Christmas.

Where has the year gone? Now, there are lots of good things to celebrate at Christmastime, like holidays, family, food, fun.

And of course, then there's the presents. I was looking online and saw some children's Christmas wish lists, actually. So on the next slide is Alyssa's Christmas wish list, which included no more homework and a pet, a cat.

And on the next slide, even a sea turtle and a pet dinosaur. Can you believe it? I'll take this one from Michael, aged eight, on the next slide. He wants, second from the bottom, I don't know if you can see it, he says he wants a man cave in the attic with air conditioning.

He's eight, he's not even a man. But of course, as Christians, the best thing to celebrate at Christmas is the birth of Christ.

[1 : 08] But why? Why is the arrival of the King, which is what Christ means, still the best thing to celebrate at Christmas? Well, over the next few Sundays, we'll be doing our series on the arrival or Advent.

That's what Advent means, coming, arrival of the King. And as we do, we'll see a number of reasons why his birth is still the best thing to celebrate at Christmas time.

And the reason we'll see today is that because he makes God known to us. Now, before I show you this from the Bible and why it really matters, I need to say that our passage today is a little bit tricky. It's tricky for two reasons. One, the language is a bit unusual. And two, John the writer has actually written the passage like a hamburger. Yes, you heard me right, a hamburger.

So on the back of your outlines, I've drawn a hamburger. And at the top and bottom is a bun that supports it all. This is John's point, that Jesus is God who makes God known to us.

[2 : 12] And he starts with this point at the top of his passage, and then he comes back to it at the bottom of his passage, like the bun. The next level is the lettuce, I think. And John's point here is that Jesus came into the world and was seen by people like John the Baptist.

He makes that point in verses 6 to 9, and then he comes back to it again in verses 14 to 15. Do you see that? And in the middle is the meat. This is 10 to 13, where we see the different responses to Jesus and how he can make God known to us as his children.

So rather than working our way through the passage as we normally do and repeating the points, we're going to group them by topic or food. And the first point is the bun, that Jesus is God who makes God known.

This is going to be our longest point, and it's a bit confusing, so you'll have to have your thinking caps on. So point 1, verse 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. Now here, John starts by calling Jesus the Word, which I think is pure genius, actually.

[3 : 28] You see, all Jews, like John, believe that there was only one God. And so how could he help his readers understand that Jesus is also God?

For us, we use the word Trinity to help us understand, don't we? One God, three persons, bad maths, good theology. But they didn't seem to have the word Trinity back then.

Instead, they had this concept of the Word, who was kind of God, but also another person from God. Take Psalm 107 on the next slide as an example.

It says, it's poetic language, but this is where the idea came from. God sent out his Word and healed them. That's how God sends out his Word as though his Word is a person.

And it's similar to our words today, actually. Our words are distinct from us. We can tell the difference between someone and their words, can't we? And yet our words are still us, part of us. [4 : 32] Such that if you ignore someone's word, you are ignoring them, aren't you? I mean, if someone ignores you, you don't say, listen to my word. You say, listen to me.

You see, while our words are distinct from us, they are still part of us. And so by calling Jesus the Word, John is showing us that verse 1, Jesus was with God as a distinct person, and Jesus was every bit God.

He was God. And to back this up, John tells us twice that Jesus was there in the beginning. See that phrase there? Now, what other part of the Bible does that phrase remind you of?

And please don't say Isaiah like one of my kids did. Starts with gen, ends with s. Yeah, I asked that this morning. Dead silence. Oh, no. Genesis.

Yeah, it's on there on the next slide. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And then as the chapter goes on, like in verse 3, we read, And God said, let there be light.

[5 : 39] Now, notice there how God creates. God speaks to create, doesn't he? And God said. You see, God uses his Word to create.

And John is saying that this Word is none other than Jesus. God created all things through Jesus. See verse 3 in our passage? Through Jesus, all things were made.

Without him, nothing was made that has been made. Here again, we see that Jesus is distinct from God. You know, God the Father created all things through him.

It's what we just said in the Nicene Creed. But at the same time, Jesus is still fully God. Because he was always there in the beginning. He always existed.

What's more, it says that all things were made through... Jesus made all things. And to make sure we've got the idea of all things, John says, Nothing was made without Jesus.

[6 : 43] And if that's the case, then Jesus has not been made either. He always existed. You see, he is God. And as God, verse 4, Jesus is the source of life itself.

In him was life, both physical and spiritual. Do you see how extraordinary Jesus is? I sometimes wonder whether we forget this aspect at Christmas time, when all we see is a little baby.

But why does John want us to know that Jesus is God? Well, because it means Jesus is the perfect person to reveal God. I mean, what better person to reveal God to us than God himself?

I think this is the other part of John's genius in calling Jesus the word. Because words also reveal our character, don't they?

Last year, I think it was, or maybe the year before, I can't remember. Someone bought me a lamb roast for Christmas. Now, how did they know I like lamb roast for Christmas? You can't tell just by looking at...

[7 : 49] Actually, you can't tell just by looking at me. They heard me speak about it with my words. I'm not fishing for another one, just to be clear, because that person is in the congregation.

Not fishing for another one. But the point is, our words reveal things about ourselves, don't they? In the Old Testament, God's word was the primary means by which he revealed himself to Israel.

But now, because Jesus is God, then he is the perfect word to reveal God. The perfect person to reveal God to us.

And just in case we've not gotten the idea yet of Jesus revealing God, John calls Jesus a different name with the same idea. He calls him the light. So verse 4 and 5. In Christ was the life, and that life, or perhaps better, his life was the light of all mankind.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. See, light reveals things and helps us to see, doesn't it?

[8 : 56] When it's dark, we cannot see, but then we turn on the lights and everything is revealed, including the cockroaches that scamper across the floor. But in verse 4, that life, or I think perhaps better, his life is our light.

That is, the life of Christ is like a light that reveals God's character to us, that helps us to see the true God, to know him and to have life with him.

And despite our dark world rejecting Christ and crucifying him, our world did not overcome him, did it? He rose again as Lord and still reveals God to people today.

This is the point John repeats at the end of his passage, the other part of the bun. So come with me to verse 16. He says, Out of Christ's fullness, we have all received grace in place of grace already given.

And now we need to slow down a bit here. Here where it says his fullness, fullness refers to Jesus being full of God's character. Because back in verse 14, we're told that Jesus came, it's actually at the top of the column, Jesus came from the Father, full of, notice, grace and truth.

[10:15] And the phrase grace and truth is the New Testament's equivalent of God's steadfast love and faithfulness. So remember our first reading, which is on the slide.

Moses asked to see God's glory and God said, I will show you my goodness and my name. In other words, God's glory refers to God's character, his goodness, his name.

When we say, we pray this for your glory, we say we pray it for your namesake, that it may be honored. And when he proclaimed his name, on the next slide, he said, the Lord, the Lord, and then notice, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

This is the phrase found throughout the Old Testament, which is the epitome, the best summary of God's being, his character. And when they translated that phrase into the Greek language, it became grace and truth.

And so in verse 14, when John says he saw Jesus full of grace and truth, he's saying he saw Jesus full of God's glory, God's character.

[11:26] And from this fullness, verse 16, from Jesus's fully divine character, we have received grace in place of grace already given. And that grace is talking about making God known to us.

Revelation. That's what verse 17 goes on to explain. Verse 17, for or because the law was given through Moses, that was the first bit of grace given, but then grace and truth, God's character came through Jesus Christ.

You see, the law that God spoke through Moses still revealed God's character. Remember our words reveal things about us, but then that grace, that revelation was replaced with a greater revelation of God through Jesus Christ.

Through Christ, we are giving God's very character of grace and truth of steadfast love and faithfulness. In other words, Jesus is the perfect picture of God.

Such that verse 18, while no one has ever seen God, God, sorry, the one and only son who is himself God, as in closest relationship with the father, has made him known.

[12:45] No one has, he has ever seen my older brother. Now I can help make him known to you by using words to describe him, like his name is Daniel.

He has dark hair. He's a little bit shorter than I am. He loves Holden cars, but for some reason hates Fords. In fact, he will say to me, you know what Ford stands for, Andrew, F-O-R-D, found on rubbish dump.

I drive a Toyota. I don't mind. Now my words make him known to you to a certain extent, don't they? But if we replaced my words with himself, if he turned up here and made himself known, then we'd really know him, wouldn't we?

Well, God has revealed himself by his word through Moses and the other prophets, but then God himself turned up in Jesus so that we might really know him. And for some who are living back then, even see him.

As Jesus himself said later on the next slide, which Annette quoted at the start of the service, actually anyone who has seen me says, Jesus has seen the father, seen God.

[13:56] Of course, we here in Melbourne haven't seen Jesus in the flesh or the father. Have we? As some say they have in Brisbane though, in a Brisbane pizza shop back in 2011, and they claim they saw Jesus in a pizza.

True story on the, the articles on the next slide, the headline, it's a bit of, it says Lord Jesus crust pizza. It's a bit mocking because it's a bit of a joke when you see the picture of the pizza on the next slide.

Can you see Jesus? You kind of got to look really hard, don't you? It's a far cry from the real Jesus, isn't it? The pizza still, by the way, sold on eBay for \$153.

The point is no one today has seen Jesus in the flesh. So how can we really know that he is God, the son who reveals the father to us?

Well, because Jesus came into the world and was seen by many. So point to verse six, and we'll move a bit quicker now. Verse six, there was a man sent from God whose name was John.

[14:59] He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe in Christ. John 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. In verse six, John is John the Baptist and not John the gospel writer.

It's a bit confusing, I realize, but we're told three times in those verses that John the Baptist came as a witness to, or to testify. It's the same word. In other words, he was an eyewitness to Christ that we might believe Christ.

But it wasn't just John the Baptist who saw Jesus. It was John the gospel writer and the other disciples. So come with me to the other bit of lettuce at verse 14. 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.

[16:03] Here, the word became flesh. That's Christmas. He became flesh and blood and lived amongst us, revealing God to us. In fact, the word for dwelling in verse 14 is literally, he tented or tabernacled with us.

And who in the Old Testament lived in the tent or tabernacle? God. Thank you. One person. Yes. Excellent. God lived there. In other words, John says, God has Jesus lived as God amongst us. And they saw it. They saw his divinity. It says, we have seen his glory, his character, the character of the one and only son that came from the father.

And what is his character? Well, it's God's character, full of grace and truth, steadfast love and faithfulness. The disciples saw it. And then they wrote about it in the rest of the New Testament. Even John the Baptist pointed to it in verse 15 by saying, this is the one I spoke about when I said, he who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.

[17:12] The point is, we can know Jesus is God who makes God known to us because people saw him and saw his glory, his divinity.

We have their eyewitness testimony here in the Bible accurately passed down to us. Michelle was out shopping the other day at Shopping Town.

And this random girl started talking to her at the checkout. And this girl paid for her items using internet banking on her phone or watch or something that they do these days. And as she did so, the girl turned to Michelle and said, I don't know how you did it without internet banking in the olden days.

Michelle didn't quite know what to say to that, mainly because she couldn't believe she was now regarded as part of the olden days. So the girl just simply continued saying she'd heard from others who told her about how they used to line up at bank tellers to get cash out to go and pay for your bills and groceries and so on.

You see, this girl relied on eyewitnesses to know what happened in the so-called olden days. Well, here are our eyewitnesses. John 1, John 2, the other disciples who saw Jesus.

[18:24] So that we might know who Jesus is. God the Son. He makes the Father known to us. And this really matters, doesn't it? Knowing God. Because otherwise, how do we know which God is the real God?

I mean, there are so many religions and gods in the world today. Do you want to take a guess at how many different religions there are today? Anyone? No? No? No? No? No? I went to Google. Where you go these days?

It tells me there are 4,200 different religions in the world today. Can you believe that? That's a lot of gods to choose from. And so how do we know we've got the right one?

How do we know he's the real one? Because if he's not, then we've wasted our time this morning. We should have all slept in. More than that, any help in this life or any hope of the life to come, gone if we've worshipped the wrong God.

It really matters. And so how do we know which God is the true God? Well, Jesus. With the arrival of Jesus at Christmas comes the arrival of God himself.

[19:31] So we can know which God is the real God. People saw his glory, his divinity, and wrote it down so that we can know which God is the true God.

We can know that he exists and what he is like by looking at Jesus. We can know he has a plan for us that our life has meaning and purpose. What's more, we can even know God not just intellectually about him, we can know him personally as his children.

This is the meat in the middle, point three, verse 10. 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. Here is the first response to Jesus. He was not recognized nor received by all.

Can you imagine being rejected by the very world you created? Can you imagine being rejected by the very people, the Israelites you came to save?

[20 : 35] It's extraordinary. And yet, knowing this actually helps us not to panic when we see it happen in our world today. Because sadly, such rejection is not new. It's happened ever since the time of Christ.

And yet, despite that, God's kingdom has kept growing. Out of that 4,200 religions, Christianity is still the largest. And so we need not panic when the Ruddock report is finally released or our country moves further from God.

For in the words of verse 5, the darkness has not overcome him. Instead, Jesus rose from the dead, reigns over all and gives light to all who come to him. And indeed, gives life as God's children to all who believe him.

That's the next response. 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.

Children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

John says that those who believe in Jesus were given the right to become God's children.

[21 : 43] You see, we don't deserve that, do we? We all sin. Before we were Christians, we ignored God and certainly disappointed God. And even as Christians, we sometimes do that.

And so we had no right to be God's children. And yet Christ grew up and died for us at the cross to pay for our sins so that he could give us this right, that we might know God, not just intellectually, but personally, to be born again of God into his family as his children.

This is an extraordinary privilege. And for it comes with all sorts of blessings. And for starters, to know God means we have life eternal. Jesus says this on the next slide, later on in John's Gospel, he's praying to his father and he says, now this is eternal life that they, the people, know you, the only true God.

See, to know God is eternal life. And what's more, to know God as his child means we belong to a family. In May this year, there was a report from the Today Show, which is on the next slide, that says, loneliness in Australia is on the rise.

In fact, they call it an epidemic at May this year. But knowing God as his child means we have a place to belong. So I remember speaking with someone whose children were grown up and whose spouse had passed away a few years ago and they were sharing with me how they felt lonely and weren't sure where they belonged anymore.

[23 : 16] But then they realized, they said, that they still had a place to belong. They were part of God's family and that gave them purpose in life still.

They were part of God's family and could serve him. It wasn't easy, don't get me wrong, it wasn't easy and they still missed their spouse terribly, but it brought them comfort and purpose still.

Knowing God personally means life eternal, it means belonging to a family and it means we can call, thirdly, God Father, Father, which is extraordinary. I remember praying with this younger guy, he started off by praying like this, he said, thank you that we can call you the whopping creator of the universe, Father.

It was the word whopping that caught my attention. He wasn't praying disrespectfully, he just understood the extraordinary privilege he had that we can call the creator of the universe, Father. It's like one of my friends at school whose father was the principal and he'd just wander into the principal's office freely. I tried to avoid that place personally, but it was because it was his father, so he wasn't scared.

[24 : 24] He had freedom to approach his father whenever he liked and his father would always stop what he was doing to listen to him. This is what we have with God. We can wander into our father's throne room in prayer anytime we like and he always stops to listen and to give us help to persevere through life.

And as our loving heavenly father, he will do everything he needs to bring us safely home to heaven and the new creation. All this comes from knowing God as his children.

And as our loving heavenly father, if though, we believe in Jesus. So, first question for us this morning is do we? Do you believe in Jesus?

He has come to make God known to us not just intellectually but personally as God's children yet only if we believe in him. If you don't and you would like to then please speak with me after the service.

I'd love to talk with you. But for us who do then, do we realise that because of Christmas we can know which God is the true God? For Jesus is God and has made God known to us.

[25 : 33] More than that, Jesus died for us so that we could know God personally as our father. Do you realise what an extraordinary privilege that is? Or do we keep taking it for granted? And do you realise what an extraordinary person Jesus is?

Not just a baby but the word who was with God and was God became flesh so that we might know God and be lovingly known by God.

You see, the birth of Christ is still the best thing to celebrate at Christmas. Even better than a pet dinosaur and even better than a man cave with air conditioning. Let's pray.

Amen. Amen. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your son. Please open our eyes to the wonder of who he is and whose arrival at Christmas meant the arrival of God that we might know you.

Not just intellectually as the true God but personally as our father. Help us, we pray, to remember the extraordinary privilege this is and the extraordinary person Jesus is.

[26 : 40] that his birth might always be the best thing to celebrate at Christmas. In his name we pray. Amen.