

No Ordinary Child

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 December 2017

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 0 0] Well, Christmas is only one week and one day away. Can you believe it? Where's the year gone? Is everyone surviving the craziness at this time of year?

No, you're still stunned. It's overwhelming. But of course, it is a great time of year when we as Christians particularly remember the birth of Christ, who was no ordinary child.

Now, I realise that for some parents, they think their children are no ordinary children either and have to let the world know about it on Facebook. And so sometimes you get these parents who do what's called the humble brag, you know that one, where they brag but they do it in a humble way to try and cover up the brag.

So I saw one post that read something like this on the next slide. It said, I honestly envy parents with ordinary kids who aren't in the gifted and talented program, like my Samantha. She has so much extra work and they're travelling to the local university for classes at just age 14.

It's really starting to cut into her all-star gymnastic practices. The humble brag. Of course, there are some other parents who just straight out brag and it's not humble and in fact it verges on rude.

[1 : 1 1] So on this next one, this is Amelia in the States. She has a two-year-old son called Montana. And he says, Robert, the dad, has been teaching Montana how to work his United States of America puzzle. Today, Montana worked the entire puzzle by himself from start to finish.

If you're not impressed, then either A, you're jealous, or B, you have no clue what a two-year-old should and should not be able to do. The Hyde. In other words, she's saying that my two-year-old is no ordinary two-year-old.

But at Christmas time, we celebrate the birth of one who really was no ordinary child. And while we see this in the traditional accounts of Jesus' birth from the books of Matthew and Luke, for example, John shows us in a much grander way.

For John kind of draws back the curtains and gives us a glimpse of who this child was even before his birth, even before the creation of the world. And he does this so that we might believe that the one who was born is the Son of God, who makes God known to us, who indeed brings us life.

In fact, that's why John has written his book or his biography of Jesus. So on the next slide, John gives us his purpose statement for his book. He says, John is one of the disciples who saw what Jesus did and heard what Jesus said.

[2 : 5 1] And he has written his book so that people might believe in Jesus. Whether it's for the first time to become a Christian or whether it's for the millionth time to continue as a Christian.

John wants all his readers to know who Jesus is, that we might believe in him. But he begins his book in a rather odd kind of way, for he introduces us to Jesus as the word.

So point one in your outline, verse one in your Bible. 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, I don't know about you, but this way of talking is a little abstract and conceptual. And so it can be confusing for us, can't it?

I mean, I can picture a baby born in a stable, wrapped up and put in a manger on some hay. I can get that. I can picture that. But all this talk about the word is a little abstract.

[3 : 54] Why does John talk like this, especially if he wants people to become Christians? Well, because in the ancient world, it was not confusing. People were actually familiar with this concept of the word, this thing that acted like a person and did things at creation.

In Greek philosophy, for example. So although it's unusual for us, it actually provided a common starting point for the readers.

Much like we might use the idea of Christmas presents as a common starting point with non-Christians to talk about Jesus. The word was a common starting point for John.

And so he introduces Jesus as the word. And then he describes his character, saying that the word was God. A few years ago, a teacher teaches union conference in the UK.

The teachers were talking about why the behavior of children in UK classrooms was getting worse and worse. And one of the teachers said it's because the parents were spoiling the kids and treating them like gods.

[4 : 59] Little Buddhas, she said. And so the next slide, this is the newspaper headline from the mirror. The Buddha generation pampering parents treat their kids like gods, says top teacher.

Now, despite what some parents do and what most kids think about themselves, they are clearly not God, are they? Except this kid, Jesus.

Before he was even born, in fact, the word was God. And yet, verse 1 says he was also with God. As though there is more than one person of God.

So already, John is preparing his readers to realize that God is one God, but three persons. What we know is the Trinity. Father, Son, and Spirit. I used to try and explain the Trinity to kids by using a picture.

And sometimes, if I had the real thing of a portable stereo, like this one on the next slide. So there's one stereo, but three distinct players that equally played music. You know, you had the radio in the middle.

[6 : 00] You had the CD player on the top. And down the bottom, at the front, you had the cassette player. But kids kept asking what a cassette was. So I kind of lost the momentum. But the point is, just as there's one stereo with three distinct players, so there is one God with three distinct persons.

Or as John puts it in verse 1, the word was God, and at the same time was with God, as a distinct person. What's more, this word also brought life.

Verse 3. Through him, the word, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made. In him was life.

Now here in verse 3, John is pretty comprehensive, isn't he? All was made through him. And nothing was made without him. Which means that the word had to always be there from the beginning to create everything.

The Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons will tell you that Jesus the Son was created by God the Father. But that cannot be true if he was with God in the beginning and everything was made through him.

[7 : 15] In our first reading from Genesis, we saw that God spoke and his word created the world. But here in John, he's now telling us that that word is a person.

Jesus. God used Jesus to create us and even sustain us, Hebrews chapter 1 says. Verse 4. In Jesus was life.

You see, we are all alive because of God's word, Jesus. Did you realise that? Did you realise that without Jesus, we cannot have physical life?

You see, this is no ordinary child we remember at Christmas. This is God the Son through whom God the Father brings life both physically and, as we'll see in a moment, spiritually too. And just as God brought light out of darkness in Genesis, that was the first thing he made was light, to bring order to the creation of darkness.

So here, the word brings light to the darkness. See the rest of verse 4 and 5? In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

[8 : 24] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Light reveals things and helps us see, doesn't it?

And when it's dark, we cannot see, but then we turn on the light, and it reveals everything in the room, including cockroaches that run across the floor. In fact, this morning at 9 o'clock when I said that, some ladies just about there saw some cockroaches crawl across the pew.

I kid you not. They killed it, so it's alright, you're safe. But in verse 4, Jesus, we're told, is light. In fact, it says that his life is our light.

That is, his life helps us to see things, to see who God is, to see who we really are. The way he lived helped us to see the right way to live.

It shows us how to find life, not just in this world, but in the world to come. See, we need this light as well, because as humans, we have rejected God.

[9 : 25] We live in darkness. We cannot see the right way to live, nor which God is real. We think we can see these things, but we cannot. And that's why we have so many different moral standards, because we cannot see clearly which one is right, and people think this is right, people say this is right, and so society says, oh, well, it's alright, what's true for you is true for you, and, you know, let's just all accept it all.

That's why we have so many different gods, and say things like, all religions are the same, and all roads lead to God, because we cannot see clearly which God is true and right, and which is not. And so we just try and accept them all.

But Jesus is our light, who shines in the darkness, and helps us to see, or reveals, what is real and right. John will come back to this at the end, this idea of revelation.

But for now, it's pretty clear that this is no ordinary child we celebrate at Christmas. He is God the Son, who brings life and light to us. And to help us believe in this Jesus, which is John's purpose statement, if you remember, he points us to some witnesses.

Point two in your outlines, verse six in your Bible. It says, 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, John, all might believe in Jesus.

[10 : 49] He himself was not the light, he came only as a witness to the light. Now this John here in verse six is John the Baptist. Not John the disciple who is writing this book.

It gets a bit confusing. And we're told that John the Baptist came to testify about Jesus as an eyewitness, that we might all believe in Christ.

And what did John say about Jesus? Well, we have one example in verse 15. Verse 15, John the Baptist testified concerning Jesus. He cried out saying, This is the one I spoke about when I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.

Now, again, it's a little bit confusing, but what he's saying is he came on the scene and started ministry first, and Jesus followed him and came after John. But Jesus has surpassed John in greatness because Jesus was before John in importance.

And whether John realized it or not, Jesus was before him in time as well. For the word existed from the beginning, before creation, before John was even born.

[12 : 02] And this testimony of John the Baptist still is meant to speak to us today. Verse 15 is actually written in the present tense. Verse 15 literally says, John the Baptist testifies present tense.

And cries out can also be written in the present tense. This testimony still speaks to us today. That's the point. What's more, we also have John the disciple's testimony as well.

So verse 14, The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen, we, says John the disciple, We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son who came from the father full of grace and truth.

We have these eyewitness accounts from John the Baptist and John the disciple that we might know this one whose birth we celebrate at Christmas was no ordinary child, but God the son.

Michelle was out shopping the other day up at Shopping Town and this random girl started talking to her. They were both at the checkout and this girl was paying for her items using internet banking on her phone.

[13 : 07] You know, you just run the phone over the pay pass or whatever it was. And as she did this, as she was paying, she turned to Michelle and said, I don't know how you survive without internet banking in the olden days.

Now Michelle didn't quite know what to say, mainly because she couldn't believe this girl regarded her as belonging to the olden days. And so this girl continued saying that she heard from others who told her about how people used to line up at banks to get money and ATM machines and so on.

You see, this girl relied on eyewitnesses to know what happened in the so-called olden days. Well, here are some of our eyewitnesses, John 1 and John 2, that we might know not just what happened in Jesus' day, but that we might believe in who he is.

Of course, when Jesus did come in those days, he did not always receive a warm reception. Point three, verse nine. Here we see the first response to Jesus is basically rejection.

And no one likes being rejected, but imagine being rejected by the very world you created. Imagine being rejected by the very people you came to save.

[14 : 37] It's extraordinary. I mean, if you know, Steve Jobs was the founder of Apple, the computer company, but nine years after creating his company, he was kicked out from it. And he writes that it was devastating for him being rejected by the very company he created.

Of course, it was his own fault because he was well known as someone who was extremely hard to work with and quite rude. But Jesus was not like that. And yet he's rejected by the very world he created and the very people he came to save.

And yet this actually helps us not to panic when we see our own world rejecting Jesus today. You see, with all the changes we've seen this year in particular and the growing intolerance towards true Christianity, biblical Christianity, sometimes I panic and feel like God's kingdom is going to shrink.

At our girls' school, which is just down the road here, a public school, they've decided this year not to do Christmas. No Christmas craft, no Christmas carols, no tinsel, no trees, no nothing.

And Michelle was talking to one of the mums yesterday at a party and she said, I'm an atheist and I still love Christmas. It's part of our culture. And yet the school has gone to this extent because of the Christian connotations with Christmas.

[15 : 57] And so it can feel like the world is closing in on us, can't it? But we have to remember that such rejection of Jesus is sadly not new. It's always been, it's always happened since the beginning.

And yet since the beginning, despite that rejection, God's kingdom has kept growing. And so we need not panic. For in the words of verse 5, the darkness has not overcome the light, Christ.

The Jews may have rejected and crucified Jesus, but they did not overcome him. For Jesus rose and now reigns, giving light to all who come to him and life to all who receive him.

See verse 12. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believe 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.

Now John says that those who believe in Jesus are given the right, given the authority to become God's children. And we need that because we had no right to become God's children.

[17 : 04] We didn't deserve that. We've all sinned. Before we were Christians, we ignored God and certainly disappointed God. In fact, even as Christians, we ignore God and disappoint God.

But Christ died to pay for our sins so that he could give us the right, even though we had no right. And we could become God's children.

And being God's children means we have life eternal. We have access to a heavenly father through prayer. We have assurance that he will never leave us nor forsake us. And we have membership as part of his family, even here now where we can meet together and encourage one another.

But it's only by believing in Jesus that we can enter God's family. We cannot break into it by our own effort or connections. As John says in verse 13, we are not born into God's family based on our natural descent nor our parents' decisions, which is what the Jews thought.

They thought if you were born a Jew, then you're part of God's family automatically. But it's not like that. Rather, John says God gives us new birth into his family.

[18 : 12] And he only does that when we believe in Jesus. And so while we need not panic when we see people rejecting Jesus, we are to still pray and proclaim Jesus' name.

That people might believe because they do as well as reject. And Jesus is the only way to enter God's family. So we need to keep doing it. We need to keep proclaiming his name.

And not only is he the only way to enter God's family, he's also the only one who truly reveals God to us. So point four, 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. Here is the birth of Christ. The word becoming flesh or human.

And notice John says, we have seen him. We have seen his glory. The glory of the one and only came from the father, full of grace and truth.

[19 : 13] And in verses 16 to 17, this grace now reveals God in a greater way than the law of Moses ever could. And so John concludes in verse 18 by saying, no one has ever seen God, but the one and only son who is himself God, as in closest relationship with the father, has made him known.

And this is where John has been heading since verse one. For John, this is the great news of Christmas, that we can now know God.

You see, it is true that no one has ever seen God. After all, John was saying chapter four that God is spirit. It's a bit hard to see spirit. And the problem with this is that without some sort of revelation from God, then we cannot know what he is like, nor how we are to live.

Without some sort of revelation, we are left to wonder and guess, which is what the world does. I grew up in a city of Wollongong, which is on the coast of New South Wales. And there's this huge Buddhist temple there.

It was built as I was growing up in high school there. On the next slide is an aerial shot that takes up a whole mountainside, this temple. It's massive. And when you come to the entrance, there's this huge statue of Buddha, which is on the next slide, that greets you.

[20 : 34] Quite a happy guy. It's hard to tell the size without... I couldn't find one with a person in it to show you the scale. But this is a massive statue. But if no one has ever seen God, then how can they know this is what the true God looks like?

And in one of the rooms, I saw all these monks worshipping other statues, which is on the next slide. This wasn't exactly what I saw, but it was like that.

But again, without any revelation from God, how can they know this is how the true God wants them to worship? They don't know. They simply follow those before them who didn't know either.

But you see, now that God has come to earth as man, we can know what God is like. And we can know how we are to live.

To try and illustrate it, imagine that none of you have met my wife, Michelle, before. And so, you know, you don't know much about her. And if I asked you to guess, you know, if people think she's taller than me, you know, maybe some people would put up their hands.

[21 : 45] And then I might say, look, do you think my wife is shorter than me and a few other people might put up their hands? Do you think my wife is blonde? Some people might put up their hands. Do you think she's a brunette and people might put up their hands? Do you think my wife is smarter than me and everyone will put up their hands?

Now, the thing is, you can't, apart from the smartest thing, you can't all be right, can you? You know, either she's blonde or brunette, either she's taller than me or she's not. And the way to solve it, the way to end all speculation is to have her come up here so that you can see her.

I'm not going to ask you to do that wherever you are. It's probably sinking your seat somewhere. But you see, that's what Jesus has done for God. People think, oh, God's like this, like this, like this. We've got all these religions.

Oh, we have to worship God like this, like this. But they can't all be right, especially now that God has turned up on our doorstep and shown us what is right, what is true.

The Word became flesh and the Son has made known to us the Father. I was visiting a member of our church called Eve, do every fortnight, and she's at a nursing home.

[22 : 53] And last week, she told me about a conversation she had with one of her nurses who saw her Bible on her bed and was asking her how she could possibly believe God existed. How can you believe in heaven and God?

Eve said to me, I thought I should tell him, how dare you talk to me like that? I'm paying your wages. But she didn't. She did say to me, I didn't know what to say, so I just said, what about Jesus?

He was real. He lived on earth. He died on a cross and rose again. And I said, Eve, that's exactly what to say. For that's what John's point is.

Jesus is God. Born as man. God's revelation of himself. God's revelation of God. So that we can know God is real and that we can know how to live in worship of him.

And so the question for us this morning is, have we come to know God? Have we come to know God as our heavenly father and we his children? A way to do that, of course, is by believing in Jesus.

[24 : 01] Verse 12. Have you put your faith in Jesus? The first Christmas when the word became flesh is proof that God is real and wants to be known.

That's why he sent Jesus. So do you know God? And for us who do, then Christmas also gives us confidence that we are not wasting our time nor on the wrong track.

See, every now and then, as a minister, I kind of just for a split second kind of go, Oh, gee, I hope I haven't wasted my life here. I hope I haven't chosen the wrong career.

I hope someone hasn't hoodwinked me here. But at that very first Christmas, when God became flesh, he showed us that he is real. He is true.

There is a right way and there is a wrong way. And so we are not wasting our time in believing in him and following Christ. Nor are we on the wrong track. You see, Christmas and the birth of Christ actually gives us confidence in God and our relationship with him.

[25 : 05] Well, parents may think their children are no ordinary children. And I know all your children are very special. They're not ordinary at all. But dare I say, next to Jesus, they are bog ordinary.

Because Jesus is no ordinary child. He is God the Son who brings life and light. And his birth was God's definitive declaration to us.

That he is real and wants to be known. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for Christmas and all the good things we can enjoy about it.

But Father, we thank you most of all for the birth of your Son who makes you known to us. Father, we thank you that because of the birth of Christ, we can be certain that you are real.

That we are not wasting our time. And so, Father, help us to follow Christ. Help his life to bring light to us. That we may know how to live in a way that pleases you. Even if the world says something different.

[26 : 08] Father, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.