

Christmas Day 2023

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- [0 : 0 0] John 1, it is not the manger story, is it? It's the beginning of a gospel, but it's not, in a sense, a classic version of the Christmas story.
- Nevertheless, it is the traditional story, the traditional reading, rather, on Christmas Day. It speaks of the light of the world that has come to save it.
- You know, one of the biggest disappointments I personally have, but maybe you as well, with a lot of modern storytelling, specifically movies, is that often there's no clear good versus evil.
- There's a ton of gray, there's a lot of nuance and emphasis put on anti-heroes, and the valorization of vice that's often masked with a kind of living one's truth or discovering one's self.
- And all too often, there's a bit of moral relativism. Again, no good versus evil. And, I mean, the fact is, real life is full of nuance, and it's full of gray, and heroes are obviously blemished, and victims are relatable.
- [1 : 1 5] But in our stories, it seems like there's this move away from good versus evil. So, Christine and I watched a movie recently, and it was really refreshing.
- There was good versus evil. There was resolution. There was redemption. It ended well. There wasn't, like, any kind of moral, you know, question marks.
- It was nice, and we both commented how it seems like this just isn't the norm anymore. However, the Christmas story isn't the beginning of a new story, but, in fact, it is the resolution of the biblical story.
- It is, in a sense, the beginning of the resolution. If you remember a couple weeks ago, I guess it was last week, we did Lessons and Carols. And a part of Lessons and Carols, we sing, obviously, it's lovely, but we rehearse the entire biblical story by going through the Bible.
- And we start not in Matthew 1 or Luke 2. Instead, we start in Genesis chapter 3, after the fall, where God prophesies that one will come that will destroy the serpent, all the way back in the opening chapters of the Bible.
- [2 : 3 5] The serpent, who is the devil that tempted our first parents to sin, would not be the victor of the story. It would be God Himself. That story and all of what followed highlights, in a sense, the angst of mankind.
- The angst that evil exists and is darker than a moonless, starless night. The angst that brokenness and evil and strife, it's everywhere.
- It's ubiquitous. There's no part of humanity, in no part of the world, at no point in time, where brokenness and evil and sin didn't touch our race.
- And really, it's the angst that we are estranged from the Creator of Heaven and Earth without the means to reconcile. And our best efforts get turned into destructive things.
- We feel the angst. We know the angst. It's deep in our bones. And with futility, we try to resolve it to no end. The biblical story solves the angst.

[3 : 44] It resolves the evil. It fixes the problem. The biblical story is a story of good versus evil, light versus darkness, death versus light.

And in no way does this story end with nuance or question marks about who the real victor is. So it is with that angst, that tension, that we read these opening verses of John 1, verses 1-5.

It says this, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. I'll read verse 5 again. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The Word who is God, the Son of God, it says the Creator of all things, nothing that is made was made apart from Him, is the source of life and light, and was about to fix and restore and redeem.

[5 : 00] That good would triumph over evil, that there's no chance darkness was going to win. But the question is how. We'll jump to verse 9, and John tells us, verses 9 to 11, The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

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. So the idea of a deity coming into humanity, it's not a new idea.

The Greek epics record gods coming down from Olympus, and messing around with the human world. There's stories about that, about how they join and steer the affairs of humanity, often putting their thumb on the scales, choosing winners and losers.

So what is the difference between that, those Greek epics, and what we read about in John 1? And you'll see the difference in verses 12 and 13.

But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

[6 : 20] The God of Scripture, the real and only God, doesn't interact with mankind to manipulate our affairs, but He comes into our existence, that His presence descends down to resolve the brokenness, and the angst, and the evil, and all of the things that we find frustrating about this life.

Ultimately, He comes to remove sin and death forever. Death, that foe of foes. The God of Scripture does this by bringing those who are far off near.

And He gives the right to become children of God. And He does it by giving us His very Holy Spirit. Giving us Himself. The very thing that we long for.

No longer estranged from God. But we are children of God. It's a wonderful story. And it would be lovely if it just ended in verse 13 in some ways.

It's neat and tidy that way. But the next verse, in some ways, is the linchpin of the whole chapter. And in a sense, it makes Christianity a weird religion.

[7 : 37] And I don't mean weird in a bad way. I mean weird in that it is totally other than what we would describe as normal. So let's read it. Verse 14. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we have seen His glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. So God does all this wonderful thing.

He comes into the world. But we could read that potentially symbolically. If we wanted to, He gives us His Spirit. He calls us children. We're not far off. Sounds great.

But then it says in verse 14 that the Word, God, became flesh. God Himself, the light that enlightens everyone. Everything. The Word that created all things become flesh.

And is this symbolic? The answer is no. It means that He literally came in the flesh. Flesh, skin, muscles, blood, hair, nails, big toes, kidneys, ears, lips, flesh.

[8 : 45] The Word, the light, has taken on humanity into Himself. And not only did He become flesh, but He dwelt among us. So unlike the Greek gods who would dabble or mess up with human affairs and then scurry off back to Olympus, when situations would get crazy, the Word becomes flesh and dwells continually among His people.

And He experiences everything that there is to experience about human life. So that He, from His mother's womb until He is born, He experiences what it's like to develop as an unborn child and to be born and to grow up in infancy and into teen years and experience puberty and become a man.

But He also experiences everything that there is to experience about human death. And He tasted it. Everything. He tasted the pain of death.

The embarrassment, in a sense, the shame of being crucified, naked, on a cross, being abandoned completely.

in fact, He experienced separation and true estrangement from God. God became man and experienced everything that there is to experience as a human being, but He remained God.

[10 : 17] And this is a big part of the story as well because God descends to earth, takes upon Him our flesh as our representative and when He dies and rises again, it means that all who are in Him, us, rise with Him.

It's a promise of what there is to come. All who are in Christ have the same future of Christ to rise with Him, to glory forever.

Verse 14 again, And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen His glory, glory of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1 tells us that real greatness is rooted in humility for God condescended, we talked about this a few weeks ago, condescended, left His divine prerogatives and He came down.

Real greatness is service. Christ didn't come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. So real greatness is humility and service and sacrifice but it's motivated by love.

[11 : 32] Real glory is seen in the lowest descent of the King of Kings into the very brokenness of our world. The grace of God given to humanity in the incarnation.

John 1, 16, it's not a part of our reading but I'll read it. It says this, And from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace.

Friends, the Christmas story is one of God rescuing us, resolving the tension. God that does not leave evil to win the day but instead will win the day Himself.

No nuance, no second guessing that God in Jesus born on this day, Christmas Day has saved us and is the ultimate resolution.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank You so much for this beautiful, wonderful Christmas message that Jesus is God, the Son of God, incarnate, fully man and fully God.

[12 : 44] And Lord, we thank You that we can celebrate this wonderful reality and that it is our reality and that Christ's reality rising from the grave never to taste death again, it is our reality if we are found in Him.

So Lord, help us to dwell, of course, on the birth of Christ but really the mission of Christ, what He came to do. And we pray this in Christ's mighty name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.