

Christmas Eve 8PM

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] My name's David Short and I work as a minister at St. John's Church and I just want to say a heartfelt thank you to Richard Watson and to you folk from Kerisdale Presbyterian for making room for us in your inn this Christmas.

It's been very kind and it's a great example to us and to other churches of how we can come together when things are really difficult. And things are really difficult.

I'm not going to read you the COVID version of The Night Before Christmas, even though it's very funny. It's a gentle mockery of all that we're going through.

And behind the humour is this dark reality of death. Nearly 5.4 million people now have died from COVID worldwide over the last two years.

But it's a great privilege for me to look at this most famous Christmas verse that was read for us a moment ago. I just want to speak, I want to point one verse out to you.

[1 : 03] It's John 1.14. It says this, We've been looking at this at St. John's and all the grand and cosmic realities of the first 13 verses of the chapter.

They all come to a crashing climax in this. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. The almighty God becomes a defenceless baby.

The ancient of days is born on a day. The divine son becomes human flesh. Without ceasing to be fully who he is.

He makes a choice to assume human flesh and to live his eternal life forever within our human nature. And this is exactly what makes Christmas and the incarnation of the Son of God so difficult for thoughtful people to believe.

Because it deals with realities that are simply beyond our understanding. Old Martin Luther said, Jesus does not become an angel or some magnificent creature, but condescends to assume my flesh and blood, my body and soul.

[2 : 39] The maker of everything becomes a thing. The word doesn't become a person. He doesn't take on a body. He became flesh.

It's the crudest word you could find. It draws our hearts to the impossible distance between heaven and earth and the condescension of Jesus.

And he doesn't just appear and then zip back up to heaven. And this was completely revolutionary to every Jewish believer in those days, as well as to every Greek, as well as to the modern mind.

And so we cover it with maple syrup and sugar frosting to avoid the radical implications. But as soon as we set aside the incarnation or trivialize the incarnation, Christianity stops.

It ceases to exist. It doesn't offer anything special. So what does the reality of Jesus' incarnation mean for us practically? And I'd like to draw out just two implications from this one verse.

[3 : 44] And the best way is to use John's two words at the end of the verse. Jesus is full of grace and truth. Full of grace and truth. And so I want to draw out two implications, and I'm going to do them in reverse order because I want to.

Firstly, if Jesus is full of truth, we have to go to Jesus to find the full truth of God. If the word became flesh and dwelt among us, it changes God's relationship with us and our relationship with him.

It means that we as humans can hear, see, and know God in ways never before possible. And that means Christianity is not a philosophy or a morality.

At its core, it is a person-to-person connection. It's the faith of knowing Christ and hearing the truth of God through Christ. It's not knowing about God.

It's a personal knowing. It is possible to have a great deal of knowledge about God. It's possible to be devoted to the church and be busy and not know him personally.

[4 : 53] But personal knowledge involves you. You know what it's like. You get personal with someone and it affects how you live and how you feel and what you do.

You learn what's really important to them and they to you. And as there's commitment and as there's interest, you move into personal knowing. So Jesus didn't just come to show us how to live or how to die.

He comes that we might know God in a personal way. And since Jesus is the word who was with God and was God, he can make God known with great clarity and authority and authenticity. So we have to go to Jesus Christ to know the full truth about God. And I think this helps explain some of the scandalous things Jesus says during his time in ministry.

If you just read this gospel, you'll hear Jesus say that everyone who knows Jesus knows God, that Jesus does what God does, and that if we worship Jesus, we worship God.

[6 : 00] If we don't worship Jesus, we can't be worshipping God. And when he begins to speak about his death, one of his disciples, Thomas, we love Thomas, the skeptic, he says, show us the Father.

And Jesus says, whoever has seen me has seen the Father. And when we go to Jesus to find the truth about God, what do we find?

We find God who makes himself vulnerable, as Richard said earlier, who doesn't just speak from a safe distance, who takes the risk of exposing himself to personal rejection and ridicule and suffering and death, God himself comes to earth.

And he lives himself in our daily pain and our suffering. And so we can never again say to God, he doesn't care or he doesn't understand or he doesn't know what we're going through or that he doesn't love us.

We just can't say that anymore. When the word becomes flesh, he holds nothing back of himself. He enters the fullness of our experience and he brings the fullness of the person of God with him.

[7 : 07] Over the course of COVID, I've been watching far too many YouTube clips. And one of the series of YouTube clips I really like is called People Are Amazing.

Anyone able to... It's a church. You can confess to this. Well, what you do is you see people putting themselves out and getting involved in taking risks to rescue kittens and dogs when they're frozen and vulnerable people on a busy street.

I love it. And I often finish up weeping. It's heartwarming stuff. And the thing is, the greater the risk that someone takes, the more moving it is.

And Jesus risks it all. There's no safety net. He puts his whole person on the line. He doesn't leave part of himself up in heaven. And he comes to draw us into a real and saving connection with God. And the way we enter into that connection is the same way we enter into personal relationship with anybody. We listen to what they say about themselves. We listen to what Jesus says about God.

[8 : 14] We open ourselves to him. And we grow in our commitment and interest and you grow in personal knowing. That means hearing the words of Christ and speaking to him in prayer, believing what he says, trusting him, and it will change how you live and how you feel and what you do.

That's why he came. So since Jesus is the full truth, we have to go to Jesus to find the full truth of God. Point two.

And just pause before I speak at point two. I didn't realize as we organized this service tonight that there were going to be two small sermons. So two bites of the cherry.

So you get double value for money tonight, even though you haven't paid any money. That's not what I mean. So secondly, Jesus brings the fullness of grace.

We have to go to Jesus Christ to find the full grace of God. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. And the word dwelt literally means pitched his tent.

[9 : 16] It's the word for tabernacle. Remember in the Old Testament, God was present with his people in the wilderness in a tent. And the fire and cloud of God's presence and glory came down.

But the coming of Christ makes the glory of God accessible and available to us in a whole new way. This is exactly what John has in mind because he says, we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth.

So from the moment of his birth, when the word became flesh, now the place of God's presence and God's glory is the flesh of Jesus Christ.

Now the glory and dwelling of God is permanently and fully in the person of Jesus Christ. And this brings us to the central paradox of the Christian faith. When we think about glory, we usually think

about Steven Spielberg and the special effects of, you know, lights, fire and earthquake and winds and awesome majesty.

And it is how God revealed his glory in the Old Testament. But when we celebrate the coming of Christ at Christmas, the glory of God is most fully displayed in the humility of the incarnation and in the humiliation of the cross.

[10:44] So when we come to the middle chapter in John's gospel, Jesus announces his death on the cross. In these words, he says, the hour has come for the son of man to be glorified.

And from the outside, the cross of Christ looks like brutality, senseless betrayal and gruesome agony. But in Jesus' mind, it reveals the flaming heart of the love and glory of God, the supreme revelation of glory.

So since Jesus has come, glory is not just massive power and splendor. It is massive power and splendor, giving themselves in lowliness and humility and suffering to bring people who do not deserve it for salvation and redemption and eternal life.

Glory of God is seen in Jesus and it's full of grace. I mean, why would God go to all this trouble? Why would he expose his son to all this rejection, abuse and torture for the ones he came to save? It's such a drastic step. There must be some drastic problem. If there was an easier way of dealing with it, do you not think God would have taken that path? And the simplest way the Bible says what's wrong is to say this, that all have sinned and lack the glory of God.

[12:13] When we turn away from God, we turn away from knowing him and we turn away from his glory, it creates a kind of vacuum in us. And we desperately try and fill that vacuum by finding glory anywhere else.

So we buy happiness with consumption, even though we know that doesn't work. Or we worship our image or our career or our family, but we know that doesn't work.

Or we find a cause and we seek our glory there. And then comes the anxiety and the emptiness and that sense of lacking. And at its heart, all our emptiness is a lack of the glory and connection with God.

So Jesus comes with the truth of God and the grace of God so that we can see the glory of God in his face. When he dies, it's not just for the forgiveness of our sins.

It's a big restoration project to bring us back into his glory and bring the full glory of God to us. And receiving him and believing him begins a life where we begin to be changed from one degree of glory into another.

[13:22] And when he comes again, his glory will be our light and our life and our love. And that's what makes sense of tonight.

That's why our carols and our hymns are full of radiance and light and angels and joy. Because the glory that has come into the world was made flesh and it's full of grace and truth.

And we respond to the grace by receiving him that fills our hearts with hope. And we respond to the truth by believing in him which fills our hearts with faith.

The word became flesh and dwelt among us even on this silent night.

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