

# Christmas Morning

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Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[ 0 : 00 ] I'd like to wish all of you a very Merry Christmas this morning. It's great to have you with us here. And Christmas is, obviously, it's a time that makes us think of many different things, many different memories.

And certainly one of the aspects of Christmas that has always come home to me is the idea of hospitality. And it particularly became, I think, strong in my life when I was a rector of a little church up on the Sunshine Coast.

And at that church on the first Christmas, I was shown great hospitality. I was invited early in the morning to breakfast of a family with five small children, a very large breakfast.

And then after that came a lunch with an elderly widow. And then in the late afternoon, there was a big gathering of a family with five children my age, grown children, with kids of their own.

And then I would come down to Vancouver and go to a church downtown and stay with them and have a late Christmas dinner. So I probably suffered a bit from gluttony.

[ 1 : 14 ] But the thing that I remember most, though, was this sense of profound hospitality from very different types of people. And, of course, being far away from home, it meant a great deal to me as well to receive that hospitality.

And I think that what we have heard in this very profound reading from John has to do with hospitality as well. It actually has to do with spiritual hospitality.

And especially I see that in verses 9 through 14. There's two astonishing things that happen in that little section of those five, six verses.

The first astonishing thing is that God would become a man. You see, verse 1 says that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was God.

In other words, Jesus existed eternally. And in verse 10, it says that He was in the world throughout history. And, in fact, the world was made through Him. And yet the world did not really know Him.

[ 2 : 19 ] That sense that God was in the world working in Jesus. But then verse 14 tells us this amazing truth, this powerful truth, which is the heart of Christianity.

And the reason that Christmas is so important. And that is that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. That's a very earthy way of saying that God became a man in Jesus Christ.

And I think children understand how down to earth this really is. Because they know that Christmas is about Jesus' birthday. And maybe that's why there's presents.

And John is so earthy here that he is really saying God had a birthday. That He was born in a certain time and in a certain place. That He was a helpless baby born in the back of a hotel where the animals were kept.

There's something special happening in my life this year at Christmas. It's the first year that we have a baby in our family. Our little son is six months old. And when I look at him, it is amazing to think that God once was a baby like that.

[ 3 : 32 ] And you would not have known if you were staying in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago that that baby was different from any other baby in that little city. And that brings us to the astonishing thing, the second astonishing thing, besides God would become man in that way.

The second thing is in verse 11. That He came to His own home and they did not receive Him. God became man, came to His own home and they did not receive Him.

And what that is saying is that in Jesus, God came to His own people, the people of Israel. He had a special relationship with them. He had cared for them over centuries and centuries. He had spoken to them by prophets, foretelling the day that He would come among them on the day of the Lord.

And that now He, as Jesus, lived among His own people. Jesus grew up among them. He preached and taught about who He was. He was the giver of life, yet they did not receive Him.

And that is shocking because hospitality was a very strong virtue in first century Palestine. And in fact, it continues to be a strong virtue in the Middle East today.

[ 4 : 45 ] Catherine and I went traveling in Turkey a year ago. And we were astounded by how welcoming people were. People would show us around a town, spend hours with us, showing us around and not expect any money.

In crowded bus terminals, they would move over and say, come and sit with us, even though they didn't know much English. It was by sign language. Showing me how to use the phones, which were very difficult.

Giving directions. In many, many small ways, we saw people making room for us in their lives. And in first century Palestine, hospitality had an even higher value.

And they had gifts, the gifts of generations of teachings that looked forward to the day that God would come in His own person, the Messiah. Jesus became well known in Palestine over His life.

He gave, He was full of grace and truth, it says. He gave out of His love. And He taught who God truly was. Yet John makes sure that we know that He did not, He was not received.

[ 5 : 51 ] His own people received Him not. They did not give Him hospitality. And you know there's a reason for it. And I think it's a reason we see today as well. That is that God's power is worked out in an obscure place in a little baby that not many people knew about.

It is in humility and in serving and in suffering that Jesus lives out His life. And in fact, the point of His life is death. The thing that Christians call glorious.

That is the glorious thing about Him. And yet the world sees it as failure. Yet that is the place that God takes away the power of sin and forgives people.

It looks like failure to the world. And John says at the end of verse 14, we beheld His glory. In other words, we saw Him die. We saw Him suffer.

We saw Him rise again. But of course, these are all things that people in the world do not recognize. The miracle of the resurrection. The fact that suffering and death could be glorious.

[ 6 : 57 ] And I think many people today in Christmas 2002 have a hard time receiving Jesus as well. There's too much wrong in the world to believe. We look out around us and we see the rumblings of war in Iraq.

We see violence in Venezuela. It's a very dreary day today in Bethlehem. Little joy there. And closer to home, there are families that are in trouble.

We have loved ones who have died or perhaps are dying. But that is exactly the world that God comes into in Jesus Christ in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago.

And it is because the world suffers that God comes into it. He deals with suffering person by person in the person of Jesus Christ.

And that's where our spiritual hospitality is so important. If you were to look at verse 12, it says this, But to all who received him, and here is hospitality, who believed in his name, he gave power 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.

[ 8 : 08 ] In other words, to every person who welcomes Jesus and all he says he is, God comes into their life with such power that he makes them something that they were not, children of God.

And to be a child of God is not something any of us can accomplish. It is not about being born into it. It's nothing that we can do with our will, nothing to do with our desire.

It is only that in Jesus, God gives new life, spiritual life, eternal life. And that's the gift of Christmas. That Jesus brings to everyone who believes in his name, a father-child relationship with almighty God.

He brings suffering people in a suffering world into a close relationship to God where there is forgiveness and there is healing and there is new life and most blessed of all, true knowledge of the true God who loves them.

And so I want to end by asking this question and I think Christmas Day asked this question and that is how is your spiritual hospitality? Do you take joy in welcoming Jesus as God and man today with joy?

[ 9 : 23 ] Do you see glory in the fact that he suffered and died for you? Do you see glory in the fact that this obscure person is the one who transfers you into a child-parent relationship with God?

Do you know him as your king and your forgiver your new life? Every day at this time of year we hear confident definitions of Christmas.

I heard it driving to church this morning on the radio. You know what Christmas is all about? It is all about giving. It is all about joy. Or Christmas is all about hope. It's all about love.

And all of those things are very true. But what is forgotten is they all have their source in one person who was born in Bethlehem and suffered and died and rose again.

That is the person that we are called to open the doors of our hearts today to. That is the one who we are called to offer spiritual hospitality today. And that will transform our lives.

[ 10 : 25 ] We will have a new king. And we will be able to sing today truly joy to the world the Lord has come. Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room.

And heaven and nature sing. And heaven and nature sing. And heaven and nature sing. Amen. God bless you.

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

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