Christmas Day

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0:00] Friends, while you're standing, let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this morning. In Christ's name, amen.! Yes, please be seated. Good morning and Merry Christmas, everybody. Merry Christmas. Isn't it wonderful?

If you don't know me, my name is Aaron. I'm one of the ministers here on staff at St. John's. And obviously it's Christmas Day. We're going to be talking about the birth of God's Son, Jesus.
And I'm going to be talking about, in particular, John 1, 1 to 18, which is pretty humbling. It's a pretty humbling process to preach on Christmas Day because, you know, I'm going to try and explain eternity and the incarnation and the nature of God and try and get you home for Christmas lunch straight away as soon as I can.
There's a lot in there. There's a lot in here. I can't cover everything. I want to just talk about two big things there. The two big things I want to talk about is the greatness of Jesus as he's explained in this passage.
This child, the greatness of Jesus. I also want to talk about the greatness of his grace. The greatness of his grace. So to do that, we're looking at John 1.
[1:13] It's mind-melting stuff, okay? Mind-melting. But again, big ideas. The greatness of Christ. The greatness of his grace.

So let's just crack on and we're going to dig into it. Okay, first, the greatness of Christ. So if you looked at the beginnings... So there's four Gospels, right? There's four stories of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.
If you looked at the... And they all have beginnings. They all have like a bit of a sort of a preamble thing, don't they? If you looked at the beginnings of the Gospel of Mark and Luke, they start by talking about stuff that happened before Jesus.
John the Baptist is where they kick off. The beginning of Matthew's Gospel starts earlier than that. It begins with a genealogy which traces Christ's ancestry back to Abraham.
So that goes back a long way. And you can imagine John reading that and he's looking at Matthew, Mark, and Luke and he says, Gentlemen, just buckle up. Here we go. John is like that one friend who you just ask a simple question and they just get really philosophical, you know?
[2:14] So he's that guy. So John starts his Gospel by going back to a time before Abraham, before Adam, before creation to talk about Jesus. And he simply says, in the beginning was the Word.

And when it says Word, there's a lot we could say about that. But just tell yourself in your head, it's talking about Jesus, okay? In the beginning was the Word.
Now some of you might be science-y types and some of you might have given some serious thoughts, the beginning of life and the beginning of the universe and all that stuff. And John is saying, no matter how far back you can comprehend, no matter what kind of scientific model you use to think about that, to conceive the beginnings of life and the universe, when you get back to that moment, Jesus was already there.
That's what he's saying. There's a great quote from a scientist called Robert Jastrow. He was a NASA physicist, an agnostic, kind of was open to the idea of there being a created God.
And that kind of bleeds its way into some of the many books he's written. And he wrote this one book, and at this one point in this chapter, he's talking about the unifying theory of science. And he's trying to say that, you know, scientists, we want some big theory to explain everything.
[3:32] And whilst writing about that, he's also thinking about the fact, well, maybe there is a God. Let me quote. He says, Isn't that great?

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So John says in his prologue, Jesus is this unifying theory. This child born in a manger that we celebrate at Christmas, he was there at the beginning of it all.
Verse one. He continues. And remember, we're talking about the greatness of this baby. In the beginning was the Word. We've talked about that. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. I mean, it's just, what's going on? In the beginning, this child was with God and was God. So that's two pretty amazing claims.
Let's deal with them one at a time. So what does with God mean? You kind of get the sense it's making a distinction between God and Jesus there, isn't it? The problem with the word with in English, it hasn't quite captured the meaning of the original Greek word.
[4:56] Because when we think with, we think beside, like I'm with Jordan. I'm beside Jordan. That's what we think with means. In the Greek, though, it literally, more literally means towards.

So it's not saying Jesus was beside God. It's saying Jesus, and the grammar of it is this, it's tricky, but it's like this continuous movement towards is basically what it's saying.
So it's trying to convey a sense of intimacy. Like, the best I can come up with is like, do you know the cliche beach scene in a movie where a couple are running towards each other in slow motion? Right? I know this is an embarrassing example. I have a master's degree in theology. This is the best I've got.
It's like that scene forever. Okay? It's a terrible example, I know. But it's saying Jesus and God are continually moving towards each other.
[5:58] That's the sense of that word. But distinct. Now, the second claim was Jesus was God. So Jesus is continually moving towards God and was God.

That's confusing, isn't it? It's a mystery. The Bible just says both of these things and doesn't resolve it for us. And that's because the Trinity is not a math problem, right?
That we kind of have to kind of work out. And even if we could work it out, you know, if God was small enough for us to work this stuff out, it's probably not a God worth worshipping, I think. Okay, let's look at verse 3 here.
All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. Remember, we're talking about the greatness of this child. This is what it's talking about, this child here. What does that mean?
All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. It's a bit confusing. Here we go. It's saying this child made everything. And to stress the point, he says that positively, all things were made through him, and negatively, and without him, nothing was made.
[7:05] There's no wiggle room there in terms of stuff Jesus didn't make, right? You can't say that. Like if I was to say, Jordan, at Christmas lunch dinner tonight, I am only going to eat, what are you guys having for lunch?

Turkey, right? Turkey. I'm only going to eat turkey or things that are not turkey. Right? That's what he's saying there.
I'm going to eat everything. That's what it's saying. I'm going to eat everything. Christ made everything. Now, if you think I'm kind of talking it up here, like I'm just kind of fiddling with the text here, let me remind you of what Colossians 1, 1.16 says.
Colossians 1, 16, sorry. For by him, Jesus, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, where the thrones or dominions or rules or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.
This is baby Jesus we're talking about here. We're talking about the greatness of Christ. This child born in a stable to teenage mom in a manger, this child is God, has always existed, and is the source of all life.
[8:25] Like, I hope I'm kind of expanding your brain here. What's John trying to do? He's trying to not, he doesn't want us to tame Jesus.

He doesn't, he's not satisfied with us having, if you understand this right, he's not like, I don't want you to be satisfied with Timu Jesus. You know, Timu Jesus, budget Jesus, dollar store Jesus.
He doesn't want us to reduce him. And this is important because every, and this will sound quite serious when I say that, but every perversion of the gospel, it's very serious on Christmas Day, but every perversion of the gospel, every Christian cult, every liberal theology has at its root a reduction of who Jesus is.

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There's this German Catholic theologian called Gerhard Löfink, and that's exactly how you pronounce his name. He says this, he's great, he says this, Jesus is tamed and rendered irrelevant when he's presented only as a sympathetic rabbi, a prophet, mighty in word and deed, or a gifted charismatic, or the first feminist, or a radical social revolutionary, or a gregarious social worker. All that conceals his true claim. In all his categories, Jesus is shrunken and distorted and twisted into shape, planed, smooth, disempowered, and accommodated to our secret desires.
[10:00] It's brilliant, isn't it? This is why these words of John are such a treasure. Okay, let's keep going. Verse 5, it's a great verse when it comes to the greatness of this baby Jesus here.

It says, verse 5, The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. So John says Jesus comes into the world, he comes into darkness, and the light he brings has not been snuffed out, and it will not be snuffed out.
And history has John's back here. Have you ever wondered why Jesus is not just this footnote in history, that he was this minor charismatic cleric that started this kind of slightly interesting Jewish cult to 2,000 years ago?
If you wondered why the Bible has never been out of print, why enlightenment, or skepticism, or pluralism, or relativism, or persecution, or communism has never extinguished Christianity.
And the answer is in the metaphor that John uses. It says, Jesus, this child is light in the world. Light. And wherever light goes, darkness has no choice.
[11:11] Darkness cannot win. Darkness never wins where there is light. You can't out dark light, right? If you have a light, I can't make darkness go on that light up there and extinguish it.

It just doesn't work like that. Light always beats darkness. And the light of Jesus has come into the world, and it's been changing lives for 2,000 years, and will continue to do so, and will never be overcome.
So this child is God, has always existed, is the source of all life, is the light of the world. That's the greatness of this baby we're talking about that was born.
Okay, I'm going to move to my second point now. This point's going to be very quick. We've talked about the greatness of this child. Let's talk about the greatness of his grace very quickly, and we'll have a look at verse 14 for this.
It's a wonderful verse. And the word became flesh, that's Jesus, and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son of the father, full of grace and truth.
[12:17] So this first part when it says the word became flesh, it's like it's saying Jesus set up a tent. It's literal kind of more meaning. Jesus set up a tent in our neighborhood. This God, man, this author of creation, becomes part of the creation.

God becomes a man, a baby. I mean, that's astonishing grace. You know, so much of life, and you guys know this, so much of life is just like climbing a ladder, right?
In whatever categories you can think of. In the corporate world, it's getting promotions, promotions, more and more pay. In the sporting world, it's faster, higher, stronger. None of these things are bad. The academic world. Well, you talked about this yesterday, you know, when you're talking about degrees. You know, it's like more degrees, and more books, and getting tenure, and so climbing up this ladder, and the Lord, he just decimates that way of thinking in this prologue.
God came down the ladder. Christ came down, down, down, down, down the ladder to be with us. And so much of just kind of like normal religion, actually, is about up, up, up, do more, do more, do more.
[13:32] And the Bible says, no. God says, no. I'm going to come down to you. I'm going to come down to where you are, all the way down to the point where you can hold me in your arms.

God came to be with us so we can know him. Isn't that brilliant? Isn't that incredible? What that means? It means that we don't have to guess what God is like.
What's God like? That's no longer in the realm of opinion, because he sent his son to be with us. It's so, I find that so comforting. Isn't that good to know? You're kind of wondering about what's God like.
I wonder what God's like. It's like Jesus. It's just like, yeah, isn't that very comforting? Isn't that comforting? Particularly when you sort of think about yourself and you're like, oh, I'm just terrible. Jesus was very comfortable around people that done really stupid things. You know? He was very comfortable around these people. He was comfortable around, you know, like rich people and poor

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people and kids and religious and not religious.
[14:43] He was... Isn't it good to know that this is what God is like? He came down to be with us so we can know him. He doesn't turn any of us away.

This is the greatness. The greatness of his grace. Let me sort of wrap this up here. You know, John is trying to establish here... What's he trying to do?
He's trying to expand our understanding of this child born 2,000 years ago. This child who is God, who made everything, who brought light into the world, a light that can never be overcome, who acts with astonishing grace.
And when you get your head around that, when you consider that this person, that baby, when you consider these things we've just mentioned that John blows our minds with this morning, we can't just like this baby, right?
We can't just be fond of Jesus. Jesus can't be over here as some sort of, you know, philosophical dialogue partner. If this is who Jesus is, our only response is to give him everything, to hand our lives over to him, to submit all our ambitions and aspirations to him.
[16:02] Because this Jesus, this is Jesus, he can't just be on the sidelines of your life. Friends, he's too big.

He's too big to be on the sidelines of your life. If all this is true about Jesus, everything else is peripheral. Really good peripheral stuff, but peripheral.
And I think our response is, everything we do, all that we believe, however we act, how we interact with people, all of this, we should bring under this one grand truth, that this child is God, has come to be with us, so we can know him.
Amen. Amen. Amen.

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