

The Arrival of the King - who makes God known

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it's 23 days till Christmas. Can you believe that? Like, where has the year gone? Now, there are lots of good things to enjoy and celebrate at Christmas. There's holidays, which are terrific. There's family. There's food, lots of food, fun. And of course, then there's the presents. I was looking online at some kids' Christmas wish lists.

And here's the first one on the next slide. This is Alyssa's. She had a whole lot of stuff. She loves pets. I think there's a pet there, a cat there. And including on the next slide, these two pets, a sea turtle and a dinosaur. I'm not sure how the parents are going to pull that off.

The next one, Michael, age eight. This is what his Christmas list. Have a look at the second from the bottom. A man cave in the attic with air conditioning. He's eight years old. He's not even a man yet. Of course, as Christians, the best thing to celebrate at Christmas time is the birth of Christ, the King. But why? Why is the arrival of the King still the best thing to celebrate at Christmas time? Well, over the next few Sundays, we'll be doing a series on the arrival or advent of the King. And as we do, we'll see a number of reasons why his arrival, which issued in his life, death and resurrection, is still the best thing to celebrate at Christmas. And today we'll see the first reason is that he makes God known to us. Now, before I show you this from the Bible passage and explain why it really matters, I need to say that our passage is a little bit tricky today for two reasons. First, the language is a bit hard to understand. And secondly, it's a bit tricky because John has written it, I think, like a hamburger. So on the back of your outlines is a picture of a hamburger. I think it's on the slide as well. And that is to say that John makes a few points and then kind of returns to them later on. So at the top and bottom is the bun that supports it all. That's John's point that Jesus is God, who makes God known. He kind of starts with that point in verses one to five. And then he comes back to that point in verses 16 to 18. The next part of the hamburger is the lettuce, I think it's supposed to be. And that's John's point about how Jesus came into the world and was seen by people like John the Baptist. He makes that point in verses six to nine.

And then again, in verse 14 and 15. And then in the middle is the meat, which is 10 to 13, about how there were different responses to Jesus and those who believe can know God.

And so rather than working our way through the passage like we normally do in a kind of sequential way, we're going to look at the points in groups or topics or food, if you like. And the first is the bun, that Jesus is God, who makes God known. This is going to be our longest point. And as I say, it's a bit tricky. So you need your thinking caps on. So point one, verse one, page 1062. It'd be really good to follow in the Bible. So in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Here, John starts by calling Jesus the word, which I think personally is pure genius. You see, like all Jews, John believed there was only one God. And so how is he going to help his readers to understand that Jesus is also God?

[3 : 3 9] For us, we use the word Trinity, you know, one God, three persons, bad maths, good theology. But it seems like they did not have that word Trinity back then. It's actually not in the Bible, the word. But they did have this concept of the word, who was both God and yet kind of acted like another person from God. And let me show you one example from Psalm 107 on the next slide.

Here we read, God sent out his word and healed them. Now I realize Psalms are poetry, but do you see this idea of how God sent out his word as though it's a person? And it's kind of like us and our words today, really. Our words are distinct from us. You can look at a person and differentiate between the person and their words. But at the same time, our words are still part of us. So that if you ignore someone's word, you end up ignoring them too, don't you? I mean, if someone, one of your kids or another person at work or whatever, if they ignore you, you don't say, listen to my word. You say, listen to me, don't you? You see, even our words, even though they are distinct from us, they are still of us, part of us. And so by calling Jesus the word, John is showing us verse one, that Jesus is with God. He's a distinct person. And at the same time,

Jesus was every bit God. Now to back this up, John also tells us twice that Jesus was there in the beginning. Do you see that? Verses one and two. Now, what other part of the Bible reminds you of that phrase in the beginning? And please don't call out Isaiah like one of my kids did. It's not Isaiah. Genesis. Yeah. Genesis. That's on the next slide. It's a very first verse of the Bible in the beginning. First three words of the whole Bible, God created the heavens and the earth. And as the Genesis goes on, two verses later, we read, and God said, let there be light and so on and so on. And then he created those things. And so notice, I go back to that slide. Sorry.

Notice here how God creates. God said, in other words, God creates using his words. Jesus. And John is saying here in the gospel that this word is Jesus. God created all things through Jesus. Look at verse three. That's what he says. Verse three, through him, through Jesus, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made. And notice again, we see that Jesus is distinct from God. God, the father created all things through him. It's what we say in our creeds. But at the same time, Jesus is still fully God because he was always there in the beginning. He always existed. What's more, if Jesus made all things, and John emphasizes that point, doesn't he? He says all things and nothing was made without him. If Jesus made all things, then he didn't make himself, did he? Can't do that. He always existed. Notice Jesus is God.

Do you see how extraordinary Jesus is? Even such that verse four, as God in him is life, both physical life and spiritual life. Do you see how extraordinary Jesus is? I wonder if we forget this, particularly at Christmas time, because we get so focused on the cute baby in the manger.

[7 : 36] But what does John want us to know Jesus is God? Well, because it means Jesus is the perfect person to reveal God to us. I mean, what better person to reveal God to us than God himself?

And this is the other reason I think John is genius for calling Jesus the word, because words also reveal our character, don't they? Last year, I think it was, someone bought me a lamb roast for Christmas.

But how do they know I liked lamb roasts for Christmas? You can't tell just by looking at me. You can't tell just by looking at me. So how did they know? It's because I spoke about it in passing.

My words revealed something about my character. I'm not looking for another lamb roast issue, just to be clear. What's more, in the Old Testament, God revealed himself to Israel. How? Primarily through his word.

Words reveal things, you see. But now, because Jesus is God, then he is the ultimate word. The ultimate way, the perfect person to reveal God to us.

[8 : 54] And just in case we haven't got this idea of Jesus revealing God, John then calls Jesus a different name. The word and now the light. Have a look at verse 4 and 5. In Jesus was life. And that life, or perhaps better, his life, was the light of all mankind.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Now, light reveals things, doesn't it? Helps us to see things.

When it's dark, we cannot see, but then we turn on life and then we can see everything in the room, including those cockroaches you thought weren't living with you. But in verse 4, that life, or as I said perhaps better, his life, is our light.

That is, the life of Christ helps us to see who God is. You want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. His life helps us to see the true God, to know what God is like and to have life with him.

And despite our dark world rejecting Christ and crucifying him, our world did not overcome him. Verse 5. Jesus rose again as Lord and still reveals God to people even today.

[10 : 14] This is the point John repeats at the end of the passage, the other part of the bun. So come with me to verse 16. He says, Out of his fullness, that's Christ's fullness, we have received grace in place of grace already given.

Now, it's a bit tricky, again, the language, but here fullness, Christ's fullness, refers to Jesus having the full character of God. So back in verse 14, we're told that the word became flesh and that the disciples saw his glory.

And then at the top of the column, notice how they describe Jesus. Full, there's his fullness again, full of grace and truth.

And grace and truth are the epitome of God's character. They are the New Testament equivalent of God's steadfast love and faithfulness.

So remember in the first reading on the slide, Moses asked on the next slide, Moses asked to see God's glory. And the Lord said, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you and proclaim my name.

[11 : 27] And so glory here is basically God's character, his goodness and his name. And then on the next slide, when he does that, in chapter 34, when he does pass in front of Moses and proclaim his name, what does he call himself?

The gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. That last phrase there is used throughout the Old Testament as the summary for God's character, the epitome of God's character.

And in the New Testament, when they translated it into the Greek language, that phrase became grace and truth. And so in verse 14, when John says he saw Jesus full of grace and truth, he's saying he saw Jesus full of God's glory, God's character.

And from this fullness, verse 16, from Jesus's fully divine character, that we have received grace in place of grace already given. What is this grace going on about?

Well, it's actually talking about revealing God to us. Have a look at verse 17, which goes on to explain it. Verse 17, for or because the law was given through Moses.

[12 : 45] That's the first grace that was already given. But then grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. What John is saying here is that the law that God spoke with his word through Moses, it still revealed his character to Israel.

Remember that? Words reveal character. But then that grace, that revelation was replaced with a greater revelation of God through Jesus Christ. And through Christ, we're given God's very character, his grace and truth, his steadfast love and faithfulness.

In other words, John's saying the same thing he said before. Jesus is the perfect picture of God, which means he can make God known to us. See verse 18?

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only son who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the father has made God known.

No one here has ever seen my older brother. Now I can, I guess, make him known to you using words like his name is Daniel.

[13 : 57] And I can tell you he has dark hair. He's slightly shorter than I am. He loves Holden's, hates for some reason, hates Ford's. I don't know why, but he always says, you know what Ford stands for, Andrew, F-O-R-D?

Found on rubbish dump. I drive a Toyota. I don't care. Now my words make him known to you to a certain extent, for good or bad.

But if we replaced my words with him, if he turned up here on a Sunday morning and made himself known to us, then we would really know him.

You see? God has revealed himself by his word through Moses and the other prophets. But then God turned up in Jesus that first Christmas day so that we might really know him.

And for some who live back then, even see him. See God. As Jesus himself said later on the next slide in John's gospel, Of course, we here in Melbourne haven't seen Jesus in the flesh and therefore not the father, have we?

[15 : 17] Some in Brisbane say they have, actually. A pizza shop back in 2011. They claim they saw the face of Jesus in a pizza. On the next slide is the headline, Lord Jesus Crust Pizza, which is obviously a mocking title because when you see the pizza, it was a bit of a joke.

On the next slide, here it is. Can you see his face? You've got to look hard, don't you? Yeah, no, maybe. Focus in, out. But it's a far cry from the real Jesus, isn't it?

The pizza, by the way, is still sold on eBay for \$153. Is that all? It's only a pizza. All right, we'll get it off.

The point is, no one today has really, even in Brisbane, seen Jesus in the flesh. So how can we really today know that he is God, the Son, who makes God known to us?

Well, because Jesus came into the world and was seen by many. So we're at point two with the letters and verse six, and we'll move more quickly now. Okay, verse six.

[16 : 30] There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through John all might believe in Christ.

John himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light, the true light that gives light to everyone that was coming in to the world.

In verse six, John here, it refers to John the Baptist, not to be confused with John, the writer of this book. It's a bit confusing, I realize, but the writer never names himself in his book.

So in this particular book, if you see the name John, it's always John the Baptist. And we're told three times in these verses that John the Baptist came as a witness to testify to Jesus.

In other words, he was an eyewitness to Christ that we might believe Christ, that he really was the Son of God. But it wasn't just John the Baptist who saw Jesus and is an eyewitness for us.

[17 : 34] It was also John the gospel writer and the other disciples. So come with me to the other bit of lettuce, verse 14. He says, Here in verse 14 is Christmas.

In fact, the word dwelling in verse 14 is literally the word tented or tabernacled. And in the Old Testament, who lived in the tent or tabernacle?

It's G-O-D, just so you know. God, yeah, that's right. And so John is saying that Jesus lived amongst them as God. And they saw his divinity, his glory, his character.

And what was this character? Well, it's God's character of grace and truth, of steadfast love and faithfulness. The disciples saw it and then they wrote about it in the rest of the New Testament.

Even John the Baptist witnessed to it again in verse 15. He said, This one, Jesus, is the one I spoke about when I said, He who comes after me on earth has surpassed me because he actually was before me, existed before me.

[19 : 08] The point is, we can know Jesus is God, who makes God known to us because people witnessed it. And then they wrote about it.

And we have their eyewitness testimony, which is still good in a court of law today. This is their eyewitness testimony that's been faithfully passed down to us. And my wife, Michelle, was out shopping the other day up at Shopping Town and this random girl started talking to her.

They were at the checkout. And this girl paid for her items using her phone or her watch or something like that over internet banking. And as she did so, she turned to Michelle and said, I don't know how you survived without internet banking in the olden days.

Michelle didn't know what to say, mainly because she didn't believe she was now regarded as part of the olden days. And so this girl just continued talking and said that she had heard from someone else who was there in the olden days and spoke about how they used to line up at a bank teller and get cash out and then go and pay for their groceries.

In other words, she relied on an eyewitness to know what happened back in time. And it's the same for us. These are some of our eyewitnesses, John 1, John 2, the disciples, who saw Jesus, recorded it for us so that we might know Jesus is God.

[20 : 37] God the Son who makes the Father known to us. And this really matters. Because otherwise, how do we know we worship the true God? After all, there are lots of religion and gods out there.

Anyone want to take a guess at how many religions there are out there today? I just did a Google search. Take it with a grain of salt, therefore.

But Google says there are 4,200 different religions today. That's a lot of different gods to choose from, isn't it? And so how do we know we've got the right one?

How do we know he's the real one? Because if not, we've wasted our time, haven't we? We should have all slept in this morning and gone out for the day. More than that, any help in this life or hope of the next life is gone if we've got the wrong God.

So how do we know which God is the true God? And the answer is Jesus. With the arrival of Jesus at Christmas comes the arrival of God himself so that we can know the true God, you see.

[21 : 50] People saw his glory, that Jesus' divinity, wrote it down so that we can know the true God. We can know he exists, what he is like by looking at Jesus.

We can know that he has a plan for us so that life has meaning and purpose now. And what's more, we can even know God personally as our heavenly father.

This is the meat in the middle of the hamburger, point three, verse 10. This is where he responds. So the first response, verse 10. He, that is Jesus, was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

He came to that which was his own, Israel, his own people, but his own did not receive him. Here's the first response to Jesus. He was not recognized nor received by all.

Can you imagine being rejected by the very world you created? Being rejected by the very people you came to save? And yet knowing this happened in history actually helps us not panic in the present when we see what's happening in our world.

[22 : 59] Because sadly such rejection is not new and yet God has continued to grow his church. Out of the 4,200 religions in the world, do you want to take a guess at which one's the biggest?

Christianity. Yeah. Despite constant rejection, Christianity is still growing. God continues to grow. And so we need not panic when the Ruddock report is finally released, whenever that will be, or as our country moves further away from God.

Because people have always rejected Jesus and yet the church is still growing. In the words of verse 5, the darkness has not overcome him. It said Jesus rose from dead and reigns over all, giving light to all who come to him.

And life as God's children to all who believe in him. That's the second response in verse 12. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed 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. Jesus says those who believe, John says those who believe in Jesus were given the right to become God's children.

[24 : 16] And to know God as their father. He said we did not deserve to be God's children because we all sin. We all ignore God and certainly disappoint God. Even as Christians we sometimes do that.

And so we had no right to be God's children. But Christ not only was born, but he grew up and died for us to pay for our sins so that he could give us this right.

To know God personally. To be born again of God into his family as his children. I don't know if you realize, but that's an extraordinary privilege. Firstly, to know God means we have life eternal.

That's the starters. So on the next slide, Jesus says this later on. He's praying to God, his father. And he says, now this is eternal life. That they, people, know you.

The only true God. You see, to know God means we have life eternal. What's more, to know God as his child means we belong to his family.

[25 : 23] In May this year, there was a report from the Today Show on the next slide that says loneliness in Australia is on the rise. In fact, they call it an epidemic.

Despite all our social media, where the loneliest we've ever been, they say. But knowing God as his child means we always have a place to belong.

So I remember speaking with someone whose children were all grown up and had moved away. And she lost her husband a few years ago. And she was saying that she feels lonely and has kind of felt like she doesn't belong anywhere.

And then as she was talking, she said, but then I realized I'm still part of God's family. I still have a place to belong. I still have purpose in life in serving him.

And she does heaps around the church, actually. It's still not easy for her. She misses her husband terribly. But knowing that she still belonged as part of God's family brought great comfort and purpose.

[26 : 27] And so knowing God personally means firstly, life eternal. It means secondly, belonging to a family. And thirdly, it means we can call God the Father, our Father. Now, I know we're so used to doing this.

We do it every time we pray that we can take it for granted, can't we? But again, that's extraordinary. It kind of hit home to me. I remember praying with this younger guy. And he started off his prayer by saying, thank you that we can call you the whopping creator of the universe, Father.

It was the word whopping that caught my attention. Now, he wasn't being disrespectful. He just understood the extraordinary privilege we have that we get to call the creator of the universe, Father.

Or like one of my friends at school whose father was the principal, he'd just wander into the principal's office freely. The very place I try and avoid, actually. But it was because the principal was his father.

So he was never scared of entering there, but had freedom to approach him any time he liked. And his father would always stop what he was doing to listen to his son. This is what we have with God.

[27 : 34] We can wander into our father's throne room in prayer any time we like. And God will always stop what he is doing to listen to our prayers, to give us strength to persevere through whatever it is we're facing.

And indeed, as our loving Heavenly Father, he would do everything we need to bring us safely home to heaven and the new creation. All this comes from knowing God as his children.

If we believe in Jesus. So I can ask you this morning, do you? Do you believe in Jesus? He is God the Son who makes God the Father known to us.

It's only through him we can become his children. Do you believe in Jesus? If you don't and you would like to, then please do speak with me or Vijay after the service.

But for us who do, then do we realize that because of Christmas, we can know which God is real? For Jesus is God and has made God known to us.

[28 : 41] More than that, Jesus then died so that we could know God personally as our Father. Do we realize how extraordinary that is? And what an extraordinary person Jesus is.

Not just a baby, but the word who was with God and was God. He became flesh so that we might know God and be lovingly known by God.

You see, the birth of Christ with his life, death and resurrection is still the best thing to celebrate at Christmas time. Even better than a pet dinosaur and even better than a man cave with air conditioning.

Let's pray. Greatness. Gracious father, please open our eyes to the wonder of your son. Whose arrival at Christmas meant the arrival of God that we might know you.

Not just intellectually as the true God, but personally as our father. Help us. We pray to remember the extraordinary privilege this is. and the extraordinary person Jesus is, that his birth might always be the best thing to celebrate at Christmas.

[29 : 49] We ask it in his name. Amen.