

P Levy John 1 v14 Carols 2012

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] It's been a year, hasn't it, of great sport and of great sporting contests. So you think of the Olympics, Bolt vs Blake, Murray vs Federer, Football, Man City vs Man United, Swansea City vs the World.

! You can think of all these things. Great contests. Next head gate, Premier League footballers will play three games over the Christmas period. I thought I was busy.

But the greatest contest fought every Christmas, as we all know, takes place not on the sporting fields, but in the charts, isn't it? Which song will be number one this year?

It's been going on for many, many years. It used to be decided, it's an extraordinary fact, it used to be decided by the sale of sheet music. But in 1952, for the first time, it was decided by record sales, when Al Martino won Singing Here in My Heart. Anybody remember that song? My father.

I can't even remember who won it last year. I was looking up on Wikipedia this afternoon. Who won last year? Anybody? Anybody? Last year.

[1 : 14] Military Wives. Military Wives. Military Wives. Graham is a great doer in a pop music. So Military Wives won with the song Wherever You Are. And that's so often the case, isn't it?

So this week, Radio Stations have, with great hype, built up about Christmas number one. But just as quickly, the song fades into obscurity, doesn't it? As they rose into prominence.

And yet, here we are this evening, and we have gathered to sing the same old, same old favourite carols, once again. And even though some of them are literally hundreds of years old, they haven't lost their appeal.

They've lasted. Why? Because they were written to celebrate timeless truths. Truths that are summed up for us by one verse. If you look at the reading that Jessica just read to us from John 1, if you look at the last verse, verses of the little numbers on the sheet, it says this.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We've seen his glory. The glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. The Apostle John, who wrote this Gospel, doesn't recount the facts that surround Jesus' birth, as Luke does, which we've heard tonight.

[2 : 34] So if you read John's Gospel, there's no mention of Caesar Augustus and the other names, and the dates which anchor Jesus' birth in history. There's no mention of the angel appearing to Mary.

There's no mention of the shepherds or the wise men. But nevertheless, John wants us to be in no doubt about the identity of the baby whose birth we're celebrating tonight.

When babies are born, it is always important, isn't it, to know where the baby comes from and who the baby is. So at the moment a baby is born, is delivered in a hospital in the UK, a bracelet is put on the child's arm, isn't it, to identify who he or she is.

And the Apostle John is equally concerned tonight, right at the start of his Gospel, that there be no doubt about the identity of this baby. And so he starts his Gospel, can you see in verse 1, with these words, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.

The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. And then our verse, prime axis, doesn't it?

[3 : 48] The Word became flesh, took on skin and blood, and made his dwelling among us. Jesus may have been born of Mary, but John wants us to know his origins lie in God.

Jesus' existence, amazingly, did not begin at conception. In fact, there's never been a time when Jesus didn't exist. It's an extraordinary thought, isn't it? Mind-boggling, incomprehensible, that the eternal God, who made the universe, has entered our world as a human being.

And has taken on human flesh. And that is what you've been singing about tonight. You've sung, He came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all. In our final carol, we will sing, God of God, light of light, very God, begotten, not created. The God who made you and me, became like you and me. Even to the extent of experiencing birth, and childhood, and adolescence. It wasn't just a short visit. [4 : 58] He made his dwelling amongst us. If we were looking around Israel at that time, we could have shaken his hand and spoken with him. But we weren't.

And so we didn't. But John, who was a contemporary of Jesus, did. And so he wrote this gospel. Elsewhere, the Apostle John writes these words. That which was from the beginning, which we've heard, which we've seen with our eyes, which we've looked at, which we've touched. This we proclaim, this we tell you about. Although this wasn't a flying visit, it wasn't a permanent visit either. Because after living on earth for 33 years, Jesus eventually returned to his Father from whence he came. And so we meet here tonight in West Ealing to celebrate his birth. But Jesus is with God the Father reigning in heaven. Now, why?

[5 : 55] Why would God do something like that? You know, it's been like the last few days, isn't it? It has rained, and it has rained, and it has rained. And it just will not stop raining.

On days like that, I look outside my window, and I think, what can I cancel? I don't know what you're like. Why would I give up a warm, dry office to get out on my bike and get soaked in the rain? And similarly, why would God go to such great lengths to clothe himself with humanity? It's a bizarre thought. Well, John tells us that it was so, so that he might show us his glory.

Do you see that in verse 14? We have seen his glory. God's glory. The glory of the one and only. People, you may be, people carry about with them, don't they?

Very different ideas about what God is like and who he is. So you may be here tonight, and you don't think there is a God. And if there is a God, well, he can't be known. It's all a great mystery.

[7 : 02] Well, you're very welcome tonight. But let me tell you this. Jesus shows you that is not the case. The great message of Christmas is God is not hiding from you. He's turned up on scene.

And God has done many, many things to prove his credentials. Others, maybe this is you. You've experienced great trauma and pain. Or you've seen others experience great trauma and pain. And you think that God does not care. Well, again, you're very, very welcome. But as you're exposed to the evidence, as you read the gospel, you see Jesus healing the sick.

And serving people. And weeping at the gravesite of a friend. And you'll see that he does care. You look at the evidence and you see it. Some people think, don't they, that God is a killjoy.

That he will somehow limit or restrict our lives. But as we read the gospel, we see Jesus turning water into wine. We see Jesus making people whole.

[8 : 03] We realise that Jesus spoke the truth when he said, I've come that people might have life. And they might have it to the full. But by far the clearest way, And the most definitive way that Jesus declares God's glory, Is by his death on the cross.

That is where God's wonderful character, Is seen in its brightest colours in Jesus. The almighty, cosmic, creator God, Takes upon himself the punishment that I deserve for my sin.

For the way that I've treated him. For the way that I've ignored him. And as Jesus dies on the cross, He satisfies God's justice. And he makes it possible for me to become God's friend.

You want to see God's glory. You want to see what God is like. You see it as his son hangs on the cross. We see there, The God who created the universe, Is a God who is holy, Who is different, Who is other, Who is morally perfect, Who is just, Who is perfect, But who nonetheless is full of love.

Full of compassion, And full of mercy. And so the purpose of Christmas, Is not just to give us a great excuse, And it is a great excuse, isn't it? To party, And to have family get-togethers.

[9 : 34] No, the purpose of Christmas, Is so that God can make himself known to us. But there are different levels, Aren't there, Of knowing somebody. In the last 12 months, We've got to know a lot, About Bradley Wiggins, Haven't we?

Bradley Wiggins was the first guy, The only guy, To win the Tour de France, And the Olympic gold, In the same year. We know that he's going to put, The sports personality, Of the year, Trophy, Behind the bar, In his local pub.

We've learnt that he was born in Belgium, His dad was a pro cyclist, Who largely abandoned his family, We've learnt that you can't really trust him, On a live TV show, Particularly after he's been to the bar before. There's been lots of interviews, Haven't there?

And lots of reviews, So we know a lot, About this man Bradley Wiggins, But actually we don't know him, Do we? In fact, I suspect there are very few people, That know him, Who really know him, His wife Catherine, Certainly does, And his two kids, His parents, Some of his teammates, His long standing friends, Maybe, But that is about it.

Understand this, Jesus came, Not just to make God, Known, But to make him, Personally known. God is not just interested, That you know what he is like, Although that's a great thing, He wants you to know him, Personally, He wants you to know him, Intimately, And God cannot do that, From a distance, The internet is an amazing place, Isn't it?

[11:09] I'm not on Facebook, Partly because I think, I've wasted all my time on it, But for some people, A huge amount of their friendships, And their social life, Is carried out, By Facebook, And Twitter, Through the internet, Through the internet, People have found, That may future life partners, And spouses, But we all know, Don't we, That the internet, Can only get you so far, If you really want to develop, A friendship, Or a relationship, You've got to spend time, With that person, Personally, That is why people, Who've met over the internet, If they want to take things, Further, They arrange to meet, Don't they, Face to face, That terrifying meeting, Well God does not just, Want to know you, At a distance, He wants to know you, Face to face, And so, That might be possible, Jesus came, From the father, And our passage says, He came full of grace, Full of undeserved kindness, And truth,

Jesus has not just, Made God known, He has made God, Knowable, But if you keep, Your distance from Jesus, Then it is impossible, For you to know God, We may know him, As an idea, Yeah of course, But we don't know him personally, We cannot be, In a relationship with him, There can be no intimacy, No friendship, No friendship, We can't know God, As our loving, Heavenly father, We can know him, As our creator, Yes, And as our judge, But that is terrifying, Isn't it, That is a fearful prospect, When you think about it, So tonight, We celebrate, Not only that God, Has made himself known, But more wonderful than that, God has made himself, Knowable, Through Jesus, Today, We can know,

The creator of the universe, And call him, Our heavenly father, There will be many of us, Here tonight, Through Jesus, We've come to know God, For ourselves, And you know tonight, Some of you, What it is to be forgiven, You know what it is, To have that intimacy, With the God who made you, To go through life, In friendship, With your creator, And as you go through, This Christmas period, And you meet up with your families, And friends, Make sure tonight, That you delight, In your relationship, With God, That you don't just know him, As an idea, But you know him, As a personal being, His spirit lives within you, Talk about him with others, Talk to him yourself, In prayer, There's nothing more precious, Or more wonderful, Than to be on intimate, Relationship terms, With the God who has made you, Is that, Is very special, Remember how just, Just how special that is, But there'll be others,

Of us here tonight, Who don't know God personally, And maybe you know him, As an idea, You may even have experienced, Something of his power, You've probably called out to him, In prayer on occasions, But you don't know him, And if you don't know him, You can't love him, Well the great news of Christmas, Is this, Jesus entered, Our world, That first Christmas, So that you can know, The God who made you, And he died on the cross, So that you can know, God's forgiveness, And God longs for you, To become his dearly loved child, But that can only happen, Through Jesus, So this Christmas, When you need a break, From the TV, And the mince pies, When you need some time, On your own, Why not just pick up a gospel, Why not pick up, One of these gospels, It's really, It's a sort of biography, It's a story of Jesus, His life, And his death, We've got some available, At the back of the church, On your way out, And if you really will read it, Please, Please, Do take them, Take it as a freebie, And as you read it, Ask God, To reveal himself, To you personally, It's an amazing thing, This Christmas, That God is not hiding, Isn't that a wonderful thought, You can know him, He's not far from us, And every Christmas, We celebrate that fact, The God who made us, Longs for us, To be in a loving relationship, With him, And through Jesus, God has made that possible, The word became flesh, And made his dwelling around us, We've seen his glory, The glory of the one and only, Who came from the father, Full of grace and truth,