

John 1:1-14

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[0 : 00] You've got four days to go. I wonder what the mood is like in your house.! Anticipation, no doubt.

Excitement, for some of us certainly.! Yet somehow, here we are.

The angelic host is about to deliver its message of peace and goodwill, and nothing is ready. The halls are undecked, the figgy pudding unmade. We're not rested or merry. We are, on the other hand, very much dismayed.

There's lots to get through. There's lots to be done. Perhaps you're more cynical. Well, Christmas is just a cash grab by the big corporations.

Why would I wrap the presents? It's just paper in the recycling 24 hours later. Trees. Well, why would I bother with that? They'll just be in the bin lorry in January. And then, of course, there's the sense of disappointment that we think the more fuss that we make, the more dissatisfying the whole thing ends up being.

[1 : 18] Perhaps you can relate to Sylvia Plath. In her novel, *The Bell Jar*, she said this, I felt overstuffed and dull and disappointed. The way I always do the day after Christmas.

As if whatever it was, the pine boughs and the candles and the silver and the gilt ribbon presents and the Christmas turkey and the carols that the piano promised never came to pass.

The pressure. The pressure. The disappointment. And then for some of us, of course, this year has been so hard that the thought of celebrating anything seems completely impossible.

Any smiles that we think about putting on will be fake. Anything that we communicate about being joyful or anything like that will simply be a show.

The year has been too painful. And actually, all the fuss that others are making at this time of year, we just can't connect with it. So, it's worth asking the question this time of year.

[2 : 15] Is it really worth it? Christmas. Is it worth all the fuss? Christmas. Christmas. Now, the way you answer that question depends ultimately on how you feel about the one who is at the center of the whole thing.

The one who is being celebrated. I remember a long time ago when my mother turned 40, my father decided to host a secret party for her.

And so, the caterers were organized. The wine was ordered and delivered to somebody else's house so that there was no suspicion. And all kinds of elaborate plans were made in order that she had a great party.

She was taken offside on the day in order that the guests should come in secret and all that kind of thing. And with all the servant-heartedness that I could muster as a kind of, I don't know, I was probably about 10 or 11, I said to my dad, why are we making all this fuss?

Why all the hassle? Very humble of me, obviously. And he said, it's your mom, and she's wonderful. There was no sense in his mind that this was too much.

[3 : 20] And you'll know the same. If you've hosted a celebration in someone's honor, all of the planning, all of the effort, all of the clear up, well, you don't ask yourself the question, was it worth it?

Because you value the person at the center so much, and you want to celebrate them. So I think the question then for us at Christmas is, what do you make of the one at the center of it all?

What do you make of the one at the center of Christmas? Because what you make of him will determine whether you think he's worth the effort. And this evening, I want to suggest to us that if you really get who he is, and if you really get, you know, if you cut through all of the stuff that we've added on over the years in terms of tradition and everything else, if we cut through all of that and we get who he is, and we grasp why it really is that he came, you'll see that he's definitely worth

celebrating.

In fact, you'll see that what he has come to do is so significant that celebrating him is the only right thing to do. And in fact, what he has come to do is so powerful that you can celebrate no matter how tough your life and your current experience may be.

To show this, I want to go to John chapter 1. It's the last reading we had, John chapter 1. It's on page 11. If you could turn that up. And as we look there, I want to highlight two reasons in particular why it is that Jesus and Christmas is worth the fuss.

[4 : 56] And the first is this. Christmas brings us God in the manger. It's God in the manger. Now, the Christmas event is right at the bottom, verse 14.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. That's the Christmas event. But if we're going to understand that rather enigmatic language, we need to go right back up to verse 1.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life. What John is saying is that the God of eternity, who was, verse 2, there in the beginning, before anything else existed, the one who, verse 3, created everything.

The one who, verse 4, is the source of all life. He is the one who became human in the womb of Mary and was born as Jesus Christ this first Christmas.

[6 : 00] Those readings that we had from Luke's gospel and from Matthew's gospel, they tell the historical account of Mary and Joseph and the shepherds and the angels and the baby in the manger.

This is all described in that one verse. Verse 14, What is actually going on is explained in verses 1, 2, 3, and 4.

It is that God that called the Word because He is the ultimate expression. The one born in the manger is the ultimate expression, the ultimate revelation of God, the way words reveal the person that speaks them.

So it is with God, and He is the one who became flesh and dwelt among us. You want to celebrate? The God of heaven entered His world at Christmas.

If you want to know what God is like, you look at Jesus. If you want to know God personally, yourself, He has made it possible.

[7 : 04] He is the one. The one in the manger is God with us. You may have noticed some of the retailers this Christmas.

It happens from time to time, particularly being noticed this Christmas. The retailers who have dropped Christmas out of some of their festive products. So Tesco have an evergreen alpine tree, and Marks and Spencers have a top-iced fruitcake for you to buy.

It even has the holly on top. But the C word? No, we don't mention the C word. Now, that has angered some traditionalists. The food critic, William Sitwell, he wrote this. He said, The rot began as the U.S. tradition of wishing one another a happy holiday, seeped over here like a dank and muddy overflow.

And now it's growing to a full-on assault. And his article was full of invective and rage that the Christmas story that he holds so dear has been airbrushed out in this way.

He went on to discuss some of his favorite traditions. And they were all the usual ones, the holly and the carols and the festive dinner. And those things, of course, they're great. They're all fine as far as they go.

[8 : 14] But the real reason for celebrating, the real reason for all that we do is not tradition for its own arbitrary sake, but the astonishing reality that God is the one who is in the manger.

We can't get our heads around it. Christmas tells us that it is God in the manger, and that's why we celebrate. But there's more to say, because He came to us, He came to the manger for a reason. If Christmas, first of all, is God in the manger, secondly, we need to see that it is God on a mission, God on a mission, a rescue mission. The reason we need to breathe is so that we can get oxygen in and CO2 out of our lungs.

But there are divers who have learned certain techniques that enable them to get rid of the need to breathe. And they can go really deep. And they can dive for a very long time without oxygen.

And that's a bit like how lots of us have begun to operate in God's world. We have learned techniques that enable us to exist without Him.

[9 : 29] Now, that could be through religion. It could be through philosophy. It could be through piecing together values and ethics that we think make life work for us. And what we've done in that is discovered ways that we can go really far without Him.

But that is not how God designed things. We were made for a relationship with God. And when we turn our back on that, when we choose to live in His world on our terms, which, by the way, is the definition of the word sin, living in God's world on our terms, self-government, you could say, living according to our own values, making up the rules, that is the definition ultimately of sin.

And this angers God and it puts us in danger. So those divers, those divers that go really deep because they've learned a way to hold their breath for a very long time, they eventually, at some point, get a message, don't they?

You're out of air. You need to breathe. And the problem is, they're miles from the surface in many cases and they realize they're in trouble. And if that person who has gone that deep for that long is going to survive, they're going to need to be rescued.

And it's the same for us. Now, as aspects of our culture implode around us and disintegrate, and we realize when we look at our own lives, we take time to look at what we're about and the way that things are going for us, and we realize they're not working as we'd hoped because we've been living in God's world on our terms for a while, more and more of us are waking up to the fact that we're getting that message.

[11 : 07] We're out of air. We need to breathe and we're in danger. Here's the thing. Christmas is God coming to the rescue. Look at verse 4.

In verse 4, John uses the imagery of light in the darkness. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Like when you're down deep in the ocean, the world is a dark place. Just look at what happened at Bondi Beach last week. Just click your news feed on any given day.

At a personal level, that terminal diagnosis, that loss of a loved one, we know that evil and suffering and death are never far away.

These are symptoms of a world that turns its back on God. And if we're honest with ourselves, the darkness isn't just those kind of things that are out there, but we know that we're not the kind of people that we wish we were either.

[12 : 15] We know selfishness and anger, and we know what it's like to be rude to other people. The darkness, if we're honest, lives in all of our hearts.

But if you read any of the accounts of Jesus' life, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the gospel accounts, if you read those, you will see that through His words and through His actions, Jesus halted the inevitable progress of darkness.

And He does that because the light that He brings is the light of life. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.

At Christmastime, when we light the candles, when we put the lights on the Christmas tree, the whole concept of Christmas lights speak to us of Jesus, the light of the world who came at Christmas.

But He came at Christmas to bring life. And He describes the kind of life that He brings elsewhere as life that is truly life.

[13 : 18] That is, it's not just physical life. It's not just breath in our lungs kind of thing, but the life that flows from a relationship with the God who made us for Himself.

It is the life of eternity. When you experience the dark, and you realize that you're mad from God, and you're in danger, Jesus offers rescue.

He's come to us in the depths of our sin to save us and to give us life. We heard it in one of the other readings. That is why He was given the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.

Christmas always had Good Friday in view. Here's the poet John Donne. He says this, Jesus' birth and His death were but one continual act. His Christmas Day and His Good Friday are but the evening and morning of one and the same day.

From the creche to the cross is an inseparable line. That is why, verse 12, can you see, verse 12, He is described as full of grace as well as truth.

[14 : 31] Yes, it's God in the manger. Yes, He reveals to us perfectly the truth about God. But Jesus came at Christmas not ultimately to give us advice. He certainly didn't come to give us a hard

time for not living as we should.

But He came to give us what we don't deserve. Rescue from sin and reconciliation with God. Peace on earth and mercy mild.

God and sinners reconciled. We sing it every year, but do you understand how significant it is? God in the manger came to bring this rescue and it is all gift.

You don't deserve it. Neither do I. But that is the good news of Christmas. That is the gift of Christmas. So, two things, if I may, as I finish.

First of all, please, don't miss the point this year. You can make a fuss at Christmas. You can go through all the rigmarole, but miss the whole point.

[15 : 37] Don't do that. It is just, if it's just about the tradition, if it's just about the parties or the gifts or the family time for their own sake, you've missed the point. And Christmas will leave you dissatisfied.

And you'll be asking again, really, was it worth it? And let me tell you, no, it wasn't. I mean, it was pleasant at the time, but ultimately, was it worth it? No, it wasn't. But you get the point of Christmas if you do verse 12.

Look at verse 12. To all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.

You get the point of Christmas if you receive God in the manger. Believe in His name. Entrust yourself to the Lord Jesus, and you will receive the true gift of Christmas.

You'll get life that is truly life. This is the whole point of it all. Don't miss Christ this Christmas. Come to Him for life that transforms your present because it transforms your eternity.

[16 : 46] You can do that now. You can do it in your seat. But you might want to hear more. If you do, you see this little postcard in the handout you were given. This is a short course, three weeks that we're running in January, to look more closely at this Jesus.

We'd love to see you there. Come and talk to me afterwards. And I can help you sign up. But don't miss the point this Christmas. And secondly, don't miss the joy this year.

Don't miss the joy. When you know the rescue that Jesus brings, it changes everything. Whatever is going on, whether it's politically or personally, we don't need to fear because we belong to God as His children, and He keeps us in His love.

Whatever we have or whatever we don't have now, we don't need to worry. So much of us are taken up with the worry of what other people have, what other people are doing, and we don't have that.

And envy takes hold of our hearts. We don't need to worry. If we have Christ, we belong to a family that holds all the riches of heaven, and we will one day enjoy those.

[17 : 58] Whatever your circumstances, however tough they are, I don't know what you've experienced this year, but if your circumstances are difficult, let me say this. If you receive the one who is sent at Christmas, you have reasons for joy.

So celebrate. Make the fuss. He really is worth it. Happy Christmas. Let's pray.