

# Light into Darkness

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 08 December 2024

Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, Christmas TV adverts have become a bit of a festive tradition in our culture here in the UK over recent years. Whether it's John Lewis or M&S; or Asda, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose, Morrison's, Aldi or Liddle, retailers attempt to give us their best Christmas advert.

And their aim, of course, is to get us to give them our money. But these days, it's done a bit differently to how it seemed to have been done in the past, where just now there is less blatant product placement and there's far more pulling at our heartstrings to get us to invest.

And how it seems to go is that a moving personal story attempts to communicate something of the meaning and message of Christmas. And so the question is, well, what is the meaning of Christmas?

Because our culture senses that there is more to Christmas than trees, turkey, tinsel, toys, tradition and time off work. But we don't just know that there is more to Christmas than all this stuff.

We actually sense in our hearts that there is more to it. And we want more from Christmas than all of these other things that we see every day from the end of October into December.

[ 1 : 27 ] There is, as one writer puts it, an inconsolable longing in our hearts. And that's why I'd like us this afternoon and the time we have left to pause and to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas.

We're going to look at what the Gospel of John, chapter one, tells us about the coming of Jesus, the last Bible reading that was read for us. But you notice that John doesn't start with the classic Christmas nativity scene.

There's no mention of Mary and Joseph or Bethlehem or the star or the angels or the shepherd or King Herod or the wise men. And we don't even get that classic scene of the baby Jesus in a manger.

Because John is less interested in what happened and more interested, more focused on telling us what Christmas means. Because what he does in the reading we just heard is tell us who Jesus is and why Jesus came to us.

And what he says about Jesus stretches our minds. And it actually changes our lives if we take it in and believe it.

[ 2 : 45 ] Because Jesus is, John tells us, the ultimate gift that we need. And so let's hear John explain why. Because he takes us back further than the birth of Jesus.

He begins by saying, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Now John echoes the very first words of the Bible in Genesis chapter one, verse one, which say, In the beginning, God. God. But instead of in the beginning, God, John says, In the beginning was the Word.

So who's the Word? It becomes obvious as he goes on that the Word is Jesus. John uses the Greek word *logos* to refer to Jesus.

And it was a common word in the first century when John was writing this, and it means logic or reason. *Logos* is where we get our word logic from.

[ 3 : 48 ] And for the Greeks, it described the logic behind the universe. The reason and the purpose for why everything exists. And put it this way, well, unless we know the reason or the purpose for why something exists, take a tool for example, then we might use it for the wrong purpose.

And so you might have a block of cheese on your kitchen counter, and you decide to get a chainsaw from the garage to cut the block of cheese rather than a knife. Well, it would be a disaster. Equally, if we use a knife to try and chop down a tree in our garden, then it is going to be frustrating, to say the least.

Because unless we align ourselves with the logos or the reason for the chainsaw or the knife, then they won't work. And so what's John saying?

Well, he's saying that there is a reason, there is a logic behind everything, behind the universe.

Meaning that, well, there's a reason and a logic to our lives, why we're here.

And so by calling Jesus the word, we're not just being told that Jesus is the reason for the season.

We're being told that Jesus is the reason for the universe, for your life and for my life.

[ 5 : 06 ] He makes sense of our existence. Because the person we call Jesus Christ existed before he was born on that first Christmas.

And John explains that the word is distinct from God. The word was with God. Yet is also identified as God. The word was God.

Doesn't say that Jesus is a God. Says that Jesus is God. So he goes on through him. All things were made without him. Nothing was made that has been made.

So Jesus created everything. Stephen Hawking, the late theoretical physicist, said in his popular book, A Brief History of Time, he said, The eventual goal of science is to provide a single theory that describes the whole universe.

Now, what John is doing is telling us that there is a single person who describes the whole universe and his name is Jesus. C.S. Lewis, the author, captured this mind blowing mystery when he said, A stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.

[ 6 : 22 ] And so Jesus is not simply a baby who showed up at one point in Bethlehem. John's saying that Jesus is the eternal son of God who has always existed.

And so Christmas tells us who Jesus is. But why did he come? Well, John goes on to tell us. He says, In him was life.

And that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. So Jesus, he's telling us, is the origin and source of light and life.

And he's also the source of revelation. John says, The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. In other words, Jesus came to reveal God to us.

And this is emphasized in that climactic verse in our reading. Verse 14, The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

[ 7 : 23 ] Literally, it means he pitched his way to the world. And in the most profound and yet in the most simple way, that is Christianity in a nutshell. The word who was the son of God and was God became flesh.

Jesus, God the son, became a human being. And that's why we're told he made his dwelling among us. Literally, it means he pitched his tent here in this world on earth.

And it's a reference to that huge tent in the Old Testament part of the Bible called the tabernacle.

And it was set up in the desert as the place where God would dwell amongst his people.

And the glory of God would fill this tent, the tabernacle. But nobody could go in. Because when Moses asked to see the glory of God, he was told it would kill him.

Now, John's saying that in Jesus, we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[ 8 : 34 ] So, Jesus gives to us the overwhelming glory of God that comes near to us. Not just in his coming as a baby, but also in his crucifixion as a man and then in his resurrection from the dead.

So, just consider how remarkable this really is. God dwelling among us in human flesh. The logos of the universe becoming a fetus in a womb.

The true light entering into this world of darkness. The powerful becoming powerless. The unapproachable becoming personal.

The eternal becoming killable. Listen to the section from a book I read by Ed Young. It's called An Immense World.

About the wonders of the animal kingdom in the natural world. This is what he says. It's about the ocean. The deep ocean's consummate darkness creates a problem for scientists who want to study its denizens.

[ 9 : 46 ] Researchers can't see what's around them unless they turn on their submersible's lights. But doing so is devastating for creatures that have adapted to a lightless life.

Even moonlight can blind a deep sea shrimp in a few seconds. A submersible's headlights can do much worse. Some deep sea animals end up doing kamikaze runs at subs.

Startled swordfish ram them with their swords. Other creatures freeze or flee. The way to think about ocean exploration is that we probably create a sphere of a hundred yards wide that keeps away anything that can get away.

And then somebody called Sonke Johnson says, Most of the time we are seeing terror and blindness. We see how animals behave when they think they're being killed by some glowing god. To be more respectful of deep sea, I'm Welton. Johnson's mentor, Edith Wider, created a stealth camera called Medusa. It films deep sea animals with red light that most of them can't see and attracts them with a ring of blue LEDs that resemble a bio-blumescent jellyfish.

[ 11 : 05 ] The only real innovation is that we turn off the lights, he says. Once we do that, really big stuff shows up. Now, in a very small way, can you see how that illustrates for us what God has done to accommodate himself to us?

The light has come into the world and shone in the darkness. Not to scare us away in terror or overwhelm us with his glory, but to attract us to himself.

Christmas tells us that God has stooped to our level. John puts it like this at the end of our passage. John's saying, .

. . . . . to make god the father known to us which means we should never think that god is trying to hide from us or that god is somehow distant from us or that god just doesn't care about what is going on in the world john's saying we can know god and we can relate to god in a personal way through jesus when people discover that i'm a minister i tend to get two different reactions the first of those reactions is that people run for cover they can't get away from me quick enough where they try and change the subject as soon as they possibly can the other reaction is that they want to talk more and speak about their own spiritual life or spiritual experience and one comment that i often hear goes along the lines of well if god could just make himself clearer if he could do something to make himself obvious then it would be much easier to believe in him and yet the meaning of christmas is that jesus has made god known to us in a clear and definitive way so if we want to know what god is like john is saying to us look at jesus the light has come from the outside into this world into the darkness well why did light come into the darkness well jesus didn't just stoop to our level i mean humanity he didn't just stoop to that level he stooped far lower because he died on a cross and that's why the eternal son of god took on a physical human body why the word became flesh because only a human being only flesh and bones can actually die and jesus came to bring us life through his death and so we have failed to align ourselves with the reason for our existence which is to worship love and obey god as we should and the darkness of our sin separates us from god it creates this barrier between ourselves and god and cuts us off from eternal life and god is just and so he must punish all wrongdoing and sin including our own and yet god is also loving and so he wants to forgive that's why john tells us that jesus came full of grace and truth which means that god knows the truth about us the truth about me the truth about you just like spotify wrapped logs every millisecond of your music listening also noting when you click and when you skip onto new songs and so there's nothing that we can hide from god and yet his grace reaches out to us because he wants to know us and so jesus became flesh to live the life that we can never live and then to die the death that we deserve to die to forgive our sin and to bring us into a relationship with the god who made us in other words as the light jesus was plunged into darkness on the cross so that we can enter his light without fear of being exposed and that's why christmas confronts us with our need to respond to jesus christ and john says there are only two responses either to reject jesus or to receive jesus reject he says he 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 but his own did not receive him john's speaking about the shocking rejection of jesus he made all things but the world didn't even recognize him when he came it's like jesus entered his house that he designed and built but the people he let lived there for free rent free didn't want him coming anywhere near them in fact they killed him and the reality is that jesus is still still rejected today we don't want the darkness of our hearts exposed by his light and so we push him away and yet rejecting him means we miss out on the life he wants to give life in this world and life in the world to come and yet there's another response to jesus that isn't to reject him but it is to receive him so john says yet to all who did receive him to those who believed in his name he gave their 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 so john says some did receive jesus by believing and only when we do this do we truly grasp the meaning of christmas because we're welcomed into god's family and we become one of god's

children children and to be in the relationship with god that we were made for it's why we exist it's our reason and our purpose and so as we close i love christmas i love giving presents even more i love getting presents than i love giving them and it's about giving and receiving isn't it and god gave his son jesus who alone meets our greatest needs in life and who satisfies the deepest longings of our hearts he was born he lived he died he rose again for us he is the meaning of christmas and all that's left for us to do in response to the good news of christmas is to receive him because what do you do when somebody that loves you and somebody that you love gives you a gift you receive it don't you and you enjoy the benefit of it and so the question is have you received jesus this christmas is a great time to receive him if you never have before because he is the gift that we need he's the gift that meets our greatest need in life which is to have our sin forgiven and he's the gift that satisfies the deepest longings of our hearts and he's the gift that will never ever disappoint that will never fail us that will never fail us that will never let us down let's pray together