

JOHN 1:1-14
ST JOHN'S, 4.2.18, 9.30 am

INTRODUCTION

It might feel as if we're in some sort of time-warp this morning . . .

We've just put the Crib away, but Christmas is back, in the form of that reading from John's gospel! Actually, there's so much in this passage, that spending some time with it away from the Christmas rush is a great thing to do. I can't possibly unpack it all this morning – each verse could be the subject of a lecture lasting at least an hour in a theological college! But what I want to do is go 'back to basics', because John answers three of the most important questions we can ask, at any time: 1) Who is Jesus? 2) Why did he come? 3) How should we respond?

WHO IS JESUS?

One of the confusing things about this passage is that it doesn't even mention Jesus' name! Instead, John writes about 'the Word'. We learn that *in the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God*, and in fact that *the Word was God*. We learn that *through him God made all things*, and that *the Word was the source of life*. We learn that *this life brought light to humanity; it shines in the darkness*. But the identity of this 'Word' only becomes clear at the end of the passage: *The Word became a human being and lived among us*. And if we were to read the rest of the chapter, it would become absolutely clear that this Word, this Word who is God himself, this Word who became flesh, is in fact Jesus Christ.

And so we come right to the heart of the gospel story: Jesus Christ, who was born as a baby in Bethlehem that first Christmas, is God in human form. He is the creator of the universe, *not one thing in all creation was made without him* (v 3). And he chose to become a human being and to live *among us*!

Jesus Christ is unique. It's tempting to equate him with other leading figures in other world religions – it's tempting to think that it's not important whether we follow Jesus, or Mohammed, or Buddha, or Guru Nanak, or Charles Russell, or Joseph Smith, or Yong Myung Moon, or L Ron Hubbard, or Mary Baker Eddy, or whatever other religious or spiritual leader takes our fancy. But only Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. Only Jesus can back up the claim to be God in human form. And we can't ignore that claim. C S Lewis, the author of the Narnia stories, put it like this, in his book Mere Christianity:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about [Jesus Christ]: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and

call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.¹

WHY DID HE COME?

The next question which this passage answers is why did Jesus come? Why did God almighty, the creator of the universe, choose to *a human being* and to live *among us*? Why did he leave the splendour of heaven, to be born in squalor in an obscure village? Why become part of the messy, unhappy, frustrating life of humankind?

There are some clues in that last verse: *The Word . . . lived among us*. Back in the days when the people of Israel were wondering in the desert, the Lord gave instructions for a special tent to be made, which symbolised his presence among his people, as well as providing a place where they could gather to worship him. The phrase here, *lived among us*, translates a phrase which means that he 'pitched his tent among us'. In other words, the Lord God came to live among us because he wanted to identify with us, and because he wanted to make himself known in the most personal way possible. The God of the Bible didn't simply create the universe and then withdraw to the sidelines to watch what his creatures made of it. No; he came to live among us, to share our misery and suffering. The God of the Bible knows personally how it feels to suffer bereavement, to be tired, hungry, thirsty, hot, and cold. In Jesus Christ, the God of the Bible experienced everything that you and I experience in this life. And in Jesus Christ, God made himself known to us. A few verses later, John writes, *No-one has ever*

seen God. The only Son, who is the same as God and is at the Father's side, he has made him known (1:18). Jesus himself said to his disciples, *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father* (14:9). By 'pitching his tent among us', the Lord God almighty has identified himself with us, and made himself known to us.

But mind-blowing though they are, those aren't the only reasons that *the Word became a human being and lived among us*. Jesus also came to save us, or rescue us. If we're truthful, we know that our lives are a mess. None of us is perfect, and the more we try to be good, the greater the mess we make. We can't possibly meet the standard of perfection which is required of us if we're going to go to heaven. Only God can save us from our mess. The problem is that the fault lies with us; it's not God's fault that we've stuffed up. So we should put things right, we can't expect God to do it for us. In other words, only God can save us, only we should. The solution is for a 'God-man', to come to the rescue.² That's why *the Word became a human being*. In Jesus Christ, God became perfectly human, and yet remained perfectly divine. And that's why Jesus Christ died hanging on a cross outside the city of Jerusalem, 33 years later. When Jesus died, he took the punishment for every single imperfection, every single crime, every single thing which has ever been wrong with the human race. So now, we don't have to bear the just penalty for what the Bible calls our sin. Instead, we're able to live in a close personal relationship with our creator in this life, and meet him face-to-face in the life to come.

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

The final question which we can answer from this passage is 'how should we respond?' If the Lord God Almighty was born as a baby that first Christmas in Bethlehem, if the Lord God Almighty allowed himself to be put to death for you and for me, that first Easter outside Jerusalem, what should you and I do about it?

John's quite clear: *He came to his own country, but his own people did not receive him* (v 11). Jesus' own people, the Jews, rejected him. Not all of them – quite a lot of individuals became his followers. But as a whole, Jesus' own people didn't want a Messiah who was born as a vulnerable baby, and who died a criminal's death.

Some, however, did receive him and believed in him; so he gave them the right to become God's children (v 12). This tells us our response – we're to receive Jesus, and to believe in him. The response which God's looking for is one of acceptance and trust. He's looking for people who accept that there's nothing they can do to earn God's favour; he's looking for people who accept that Jesus Christ is the Lord God Almighty in human form; he's looking for people who accept that Jesus has the right to demand our total allegiance and complete obedience to his teaching; he's looking for people who are prepared to trust him even when it doesn't seem to make sense; he's looking for people who are prepared to do as John the Baptist did and *bear witness* to Jesus – to tell other people who he is and to live their lives for him. In short, the Lord demands our complete loyalty, our total commitment, and our absolute obedience. In return, he gives us the

right to become children of God, the right to become citizens in his kingdom, the right to become members of his family.

CONCLUSION

Many of us here this morning have already made that step of commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. For me, Jesus is my closest friend, the one person who I know will never let me down; I don't know how I'd live without knowing that he's with me, every step of the way.

But it may be that there are some here this morning who don't know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. You may be a visitor, here just for this morning. Or you may be someone who's been a member of this congregation for most of your life. It doesn't matter why you've come. You're here because God himself wants you to be here. And what does matter is that before you leave, you make a decision: a decision to consider who this Jesus really is, and the claims he makes on your life. The response you choose to make to Jesus Christ is the most important decision you ever make in your whole life. If you want to know more, please speak to me afterwards. But PLEASE don't go away and not give it another thought. If you do that, you'll lose the opportunity to receive the Word become humn, to become a child of God, to be given a fresh start, with the assurance of Jesus' love and presence, no matter what may happen in the future.

¹ C S Lewis, Mere Christianity, (Glasgow, Collins, 1952; Fount Paperback edition, 1977), p 52

² Anselm of Canterbury, Cur Deus Homo ('Why God became man'), 1098