

Watchnight Service 2017

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Preacher: Alistair Chalmers

[0 : 00] Well, good evening everyone. It's my pleasure to be here with you this evening. My name is Alistair. I have the privilege of being on staff here at the church and I'm just going to spend a few minutes thinking with you together about the true meaning of Christmas.

But before we get into what Christmas is all about, I have a few questions for you. What first comes to mind when you see this number? 696,271.

Now, maybe as you sit there, you're thinking, well, that's probably the amount of Christmas trees, real Christmas trees that were bought in Scotland this year. What about this number here?

54,488. What do you think that is? Maybe it's the amount of mince pies that have been eaten this past week here in Edinburgh alone.

It's probably close to that in my house alone. I do love a mince pie. But what these numbers are is 696,271 is the amount of babies that were born in England and Wales in 2016.

[1 : 08] And 54,488 is the number of babies that were born in Scotland alone in 2016. So these are huge, huge sums of little tiny babies.

But most of them, if not all of them, went by unnoticed by most of us in this room, didn't they? We didn't really think about them. We didn't really contemplate these births as they were happening.

But yet, once a year, we all gather and we contemplate one birth. And so as we come to Christmas tomorrow, as we think about the birth of Jesus, I want us to think about the question of, is this just another one of those babies?

Is this just another number to add to the statistic? See, one of the things I always wonder when I hold or see a newborn baby is, what will they grow up to be?

What will they be like? What will they do? What will this tiny little baby do one day? What will people say about them? What will they be like? Who will they be? So bring those very same questions into the Christmas story.

[2 : 19] Who is this baby? Is this just another baby? And what will he do? And what will he be like? Well, John, as Alistair read out to us earlier, one of Jesus' followers leaves us in absolutely no doubt at all as to the character and identity of this little baby.

We know him as Jesus. John describes him as the Word of God. He describes him as light. And he describes him as the Word became flesh.

See, unlike the other eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life, unlike Mark, Matthew, and Luke, John's a little bit different.

He doesn't start with Jesus' birth. He doesn't start with the first acts of Jesus in his adult life. Instead, he goes way, way back to the beginning. He goes way back, and he goes really, really deep.

See, John isn't the kind of guy who's up for that kind of small chat, small talk that we like. He isn't the kind of guy, when he first meets you, to ask you what you do for a living. Instead, he says, Hi, my name is John.

[3 : 30] And then he asks you the question, which makes you search your soul for that whole evening. John says that Jesus made us, that Jesus taught us, and that Jesus forgave us.

John's invitation to us this Christmas is where you come and see that Jesus is not just another baby, but that he is the Son of God who has huge significance for this world.

So what did this baby grow up to do? What has he done? What has he done to give him such prominence in history and in the Bible? Well, John begins his explanation of who Jesus is by stating some amazing truths in John 1.

And he says that Jesus is the Word, and the Word is God, and that everything that was ever created was created through this Word. John is telling us that Jesus made us.

Now, I know that sounds a little bit strange. I've read the Bible. I know there are a few things in it which can seem a little bit odd. How can the Word, words, become flesh?

[4 : 47] Well, John is drawing our attention to the identity of Jesus as the Son of God, as the one through whom God is working. In short, John is telling us that Jesus is God.

The language that John uses rings of Genesis 1, doesn't it? Where God spoke the whole world into existence, almost without any effort at all.

The stars that we admire on a clear night, the planets which we haven't even begun to understand yet, they are given almost a throwaway verse where it says, yeah, and he also made the stars.

That is the greatness and power of God. And John reveals to us that Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is the one in whom and through whom all things were created.

This baby that we see pictured so calmly and so small, that is the baby who created and who upholds the universe. This baby so small and so fragile is the one whose hand upholds the world that we live in and the world that we love, whose power created the stars and planets and whose love made him stoop down from his place in heaven to an animal feeding trough in the first century Israel.

[6 : 13] This is the Jesus that we celebrate this Christmas. This is the Word of God who created us, who made us, who knows us and who loves us.

But John doesn't stop there. See, in John chapter 1 verse 14, we find the most heartwarming verse filled with love and deep theology which should make us want to praise God with every inch of our bodies.

It says, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus taught us. So why is it significant that Jesus, this person, this Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us?

And what exactly did he teach us? Did he teach us by becoming flesh? You see, John explains that Jesus is light. And what does light do? Well, light exposes things.

It reveals things. And that is exactly what Jesus did. See, the Bible tells us that mankind is naturally in spiritual darkness. We are naturally separated from God.

[7 : 22] Each of us is born with a natural desire to reject God and his rule over our lives. See, we think we know better than our Creator. That's the truth. We live in darkness.

But Jesus, being light, came into this world and he became one of us. Jesus left his place of glory and honor to become one of us so that our God can know our struggles, so that our God can know our temptations, and that he knows what it's like to live in and suffer in a broken world.

Light exposes darkness, both the good and the bad that come with that. See, sometimes we like what light reveals. Sometimes we don't.

So during a blackout in our flat, for example, I will go to the cupboard where I know exactly where I've left the torch, because it happens quite a few times a year, and I'll go to the cupboard where I know I've left the candles and I will light everything up around the flat so I know where I'm walking, so I don't bump into anything.

Light, in that sense, is good. We need light. But then we also have a little card on our fridge. Now, it is in German. You see it there on the bottom right-hand side of the screen, but it says something along these lines.

[8 : 45] The kitchen looks like a pigsty, but I've turned off the light, so now it's all right. And I definitely fell out today. We celebrated Christmas today, and I haven't done any of the dishes yet, so I turned off the light and shut the door and walked away happy.

See, I definitely have the tendency to shut the kitchen door and walk away. Out of sight, out of mind, there is no light, it's fine. Light exposes both the good things and the bad.

Now, Jesus coming into the world has shone a light on mankind. Jesus taught people who they really were at their very core, how people love to be and live in darkness, how people love to be in rebellion against God.

Jesus came in flesh to teach us about our spiritual state before God. And even though he did that, the truth is that the world didn't recognize him.

They didn't see him for who he truly was, and that was true in the first century Middle East, and it is just as true today. If you go out into Edinburgh tomorrow morning and you say, Merry Christmas, what's the reason for the season?

[10 : 00] Why do we celebrate Christmas? The first response will probably be, well, Christmas trees, Christmas decorations, presents, and maybe if you're lucky in your fifth and sixth guess, you might get to Jesus.

Or ask people who Jesus was or what Jesus did. some people don't even recognize that he was a historical person. And there aren't many people who recognize him to be the son of God.

Some people say that he was just a good moral teacher. See, even today, people do not recognize that Jesus is the light of the world. The light who came into our darkness.

The light who exposed who we truly are. as a human race. See, but Jesus didn't just shine light onto our sinful nature.

He didn't just come into the world to point the finger and tell us how we are bad, bad people. Jesus didn't come to point the finger, but he came to bring the solution to our problem.

[11 : 10] And the truth is that Jesus forgave us. Most of us know someone who finds it really, really easy to point out flaws or problems with an idea or something at work maybe.

But when you ask them what their solution to those flaws or to those problems would be, they lift their hands and say, well, I don't know. They find it really easy to point the finger, but not to bring a solution.

You see, well, Jesus doesn't do that. He comes into the world and he brings the only solution. He gives us the only fix to the problem of our spiritual darkness and rejection of God.

What is that solution? Well, it is Jesus himself. The word became flesh. Because mankind is so naturally sinful, we naturally do things wrong in and of ourselves, we cannot turn to God.

And so Jesus, the word of God, God himself, the light of God became flesh to show us who God is and to make it possible for mankind to be forgiven.

[12 : 21] Now, how was that made possible? Well, it's made possible because this baby that we celebrate lived a sacrificial life after teaching people about God, after loving people with a perfect love.

He was nailed to a cross, even though he was perfectly innocent. so that we could be called children of God, so that we could be forgiven. On the cross, the anger of God against sin was poured on Jesus.

He took the punishment that each of us deserve. And so that we could be offered the amazing gift that is the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus has shown us the fullness of grace. grace. And he has made it possible for us to know God, as John says in John 1, verses 17 to 18.

See, grace is one of those words that Christians love to throw around, but quite often we don't explain it. When the Bible speaks of grace, it refers to God giving us something that we don't deserve.

[13 : 31] grace. So a modern example would be if a man stood before a judge and pled guilty of a parking ticket, for example, the person should take that punishment because it is a consequence of their actions.

But grace is when the judge passes judgment but stands up and says, well, I will pay that man's fine. I will take the punishment so that he doesn't have to. That is grace.

grace. See, Jesus shows us true grace, perfect grace, unfailing grace, because being God, he knows exactly what mankind is like.

He knows our hearts, how we constantly do things wrong, how we constantly rebel against God. And still, all of that, despite all of that, Jesus still shows us grace.

the Bible is a revelation of God's character, of God's love for a fallen and broken world, of God's desire to see his creation redeemed and restored to a right relationship with him.

[14 : 40] And the Bible tells us how that is possible through this person, Jesus Christ. It's possible because the word of God became flesh and dwelt amongst us.

Jesus, the son of God, was born into this world. He lived the perfect life, that we could never, ever live. And he died the death that we all deserve, taking the punishment for our sins and our wrongdoings.

And he rose, victorious, defeating Satan, sin, and our ultimate enemy, death. And so let's ask that question again.

Is this just another baby? what the Bible shouts at us, no. This is the word of God. This is God whose power created the world and who upholds it even now.

Jesus made us. This is the light of God who came into the world to shine light into the darkness of our human souls. Jesus taught us.

[15 : 44] And this is the Son of God, revealing God to us and taking the punishment for our sins so that we can be forgiven. Jesus forgave us.

Jesus is not just another baby, but he is the Son of God who is offering you life and forgiveness. Will you accept this gift of heaven?

Will you consider this Christmas that this baby Jesus that we celebrate is the one and only in the world who can offer us true love and true forgiveness?

Will you see Jesus for who he truly is this year? And will you give him all of the praise and honor that he rightfully deserves? Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending Jesus. Lord, we confess that we are all sinful, we do things wrong, we rebel against you day in and day out, and yet still in your grace and in your love, you sent your Son to pay the punishment for our sins.

[16 : 55] Lord, help us this evening and tomorrow morning remember the reason for the season.
Help us remember that you are the Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us.
Father, we thank you so much for your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.