

John 1:1-14

Christmas was drawing near. Late one night I was travelling from Melbourne to my home in Koroit, near Warrnambool. Feeling tired, I was keen to get home. At about 11.00 pm, I suddenly saw a bright light just up ahead of me. Soon, I could see that it was actually two lights. They were on the right hand side of the road. Suddenly, two beautiful, twinkling, red and blue coloured lights appeared. They were flashing alternately on and off. It was so pretty. The beautiful coloured lights and the two bright white lights then started to follow me down the road. I really thought that Christmas had come early for me. Alas! It was not the case. The police had caught me speeding.

Strangely, this fulfilled what a police officer had said to me a few weeks earlier. The police had pulled me over for preliminary breath testing. My reading was zero. But then, as the police officer farewelled me, he made a strange comment. Well, at the time, I thought it was strange. He simply said, **‘Catch you later!’** I hadn’t thought that it would be so soon.

Let’s go back to my trip home. The police officer was very kind. I felt guilty. He asked my profession. Ashamed, I told him that I was a Presbyterian minister. Maybe he felt sorry for me. Or maybe he thought a minister of the Church shouldn’t be booked at Christmas. Anyway, he let me off. Then he wished me safe travel home.

That’s grace, isn’t it? I was guilty of speeding. I deserved a fine for speeding. But he let me go free. Yes, that’s grace. *But* it’s not God’s grace. It cost the officer very little to let me go free of any penalty. In fact, it really cost him nothing. But it cost God the death of His Son to free me from the penalty for my sins. Yes! That’s grace.

For, God sent His Son Jesus to this Earth on a rescue mission. He came to **save His people from their sins** (Matthew 1:21).

The reason for Jesus’ birth wasn’t just so that we could have a party. Nor did God send His Son for us to have a holiday. Christ was born in order to die on a Roman cross. He came to die the death that you and I deserve. Now there are many other reasons for the birth of Christ. He came to reveal God to us and to bring in the kingdom of God. But at His birth the shadow of the cross falls across the manger.

Many verses in the Bible hinge the birth of Christ. 1 Timothy 1:15, **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.** We read in Romans 6:23, **The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.** That’s grace! The Lord Jesus came into a world of broken relationships. He came to reconcile us to God. Isaiah 61:1 is a verse that the Lord Jesus Christ referred to at the commencement of His ministry. **The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me... He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted.**

Since Adam and Eve fell in Garden of Eden we’ve lived in a fallen world. The perfect relationship between God and humanity, His image bearers, is broken! The perfect relationship with God’s creation and with one another—broken! But now, with Jesus’ birth, God has given us what we do not deserve. He has given us what we could never earn. His free gift is forgiveness of our sin, peace with Him and eternal life. With the birth of the Lord Jesus God has provided the way for you and me to be reconciled with Him.

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Adam and Eve's sin is revealed in God's searching question to them. Genesis 3:11b, "***Have you eaten some fruit from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?***" God knew what they'd done. Now, He wanted them to recognise their sin. John has this in mind in 1 John 1:9, ***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*** Confession isn't telling God something new. Adam and Eve couldn't hide their sin from God. It's the same with us. But God wants us to know that we've rebelled. Then, upon confession of our sin, with assurance, we receive God's promise. There are three promises here. 1. God ***is faithful and just***; 2. God ***will forgive us our sins***; and 3. God will ***purify us from all unrighteousness.*** And that's grace.

How can God do that for us? The answer begins with the birth of Christ. For, in the Incarnation, God became man. The Lord Jesus left the glory He shared with the Father in heaven to become just like one of us. Christ Jesus came to save us from our sin.

John begins his Gospel by speaking about the Word. 1:1, ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*** These early verses in John assure us that the Lord Jesus is ***Immanuel... God with us*** (Matthew 1:23).

John 1:14 is part of John's brief account of Christ's birth (His Incarnation). ***The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*** Remember that John began his Gospel by speaking about the Word. 1:1 again, ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*** The ***Word*** who was with God, and who is God, was made flesh.

For a brief moment in time (some 33 years), Christ lived among us. The eternal ***Word*** was born as a human being. At His birth the Lord Jesus is, then, fully God and fully man. He is God made man for our salvation.

The words '***made his dwelling***' in 1:14 are interesting. We'd expect them to come from a verb meaning 'to live' or 'to inhabit'. They don't. Literally translated the Greek verb means 'to pitch a tent' or 'to make camp for a period of time'. This is one of those occasions in John where he takes us back to the Old Testament.

In Exodus 33:7-11 we read about Moses meeting with God in the ***tent of meeting***. In this tent (also known as the tabernacle) God regularly met with Moses. We read in Exodus 33:9, ***As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance to the tent, while the LORD spoke with Moses.*** Moses entered that tent as a mediator [= a go-between] between God and God's people, Israel.

Moses acts as a figure of Christ towards God's people. He speaks to God on behalf of the people. He receives the word of God for them. He also intercedes (pleads for them when they rebel) and, generally speaking, gives the people God's instructions.

But Moses died thousands of years ago. His days as a mediator are long past. From Moses up until the birth of Christ, the prophets would speak for God. But today those times are also in the past. Today, as the writer to the Hebrews reminds us (1:1, 2), ***God... has spoken to us by his Son.***

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In the fullness of time, God sent His Son to us (Galatians 4:4). John 1:14a, ***The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*** Israel had to wait for hundreds of years for the coming of Christ. Yet we know that it was in God's perfect timing. Not a year too soon and not a year too late.

John is telling us that the Lord Jesus also came to represent God to us and to represent us to God. He came to make God known to us in a new and exciting way. That's what we read in John 1:18, ***No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.***

Sadly, we cannot know God or get right with Him by being good, that is, by simple obedience. Not one of us could ever be good enough. The Apostle Paul sums us up so well in Romans 3:10, 23, ***There is no one righteousness, not even one... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***

And so the Lord Jesus came to make it possible for you and me to get right with God. 1 Peter 3:18a, ***For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.***

I hope you can see that the Incarnation [= God coming to us in Christ's birth] is extremely practical. John expresses something that is deeply personal. Christ is not God whom we might meet from time to time in the church. Nor is He only heard in the prophets. Instead, He is ***God with us.*** And that's what is so amazing about God's grace.

As Israel was about to enter the Promised Land God spoke to them. Deuteronomy 31:6b, ***“Do not be afraid or terrified... for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”*** What a glorious promise of God's grace to us. Now, united to Christ by faith, we have the assurance of His presence with us.

In Matthew 28:20b we read the promise of the Lord Jesus to His disciples, ***“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*** And He is present with us by His Spirit.

The coming of the Lord Jesus is the greatest possible expression of God's mercy and grace. We don't just hear a voice from heaven, as the people did at Mt. Sinai. Nor do we see God in a pillar of cloud or a pillar of fire as the people did in the exodus from Egypt. Nor do we have to stand by, while a priest (like Moses) enters into God's presence and only once a year.

Furthermore we don't have to offer daily sacrifices in order to reconcile us to God. Rather, we have the Lord Jesus who fulfils all of those things. For, only by God's grace can you and I know Him. (Ephesians 2:8) ***It is by grace you have been saved...***

Only by grace can we know forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. And so John can testify to us in 1:14b, ***We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

Later, John writes in 1 John 2:2b, 3a, ***We have one who speaks to the Father in our defence—***

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Jesus Christ the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. It's the Lord Jesus who pleads for us at the throne of God. He, who came from the Father, now pleads His shed blood for His people.

Christians often use GRACE as an acronym. **G**od's **R**iches **A** Christ's **E**xpense. Yet we'd like a little more information. Jerry Bridges defines grace as *God's favour through Christ to people who deserve His wrath*. But we don't like to think that God hates sin or that He could pour out His wrath on unrepentant sinners. Yet that's what 1 John 2:2 is all about. The Lord Jesus bore the wrath of God against sin, on the cross, in our place.

By grace, through faith in Christ we're no longer the objects of God's wrath. Instead, through faith in Christ we're the objects of His love. We read in Ephesians 2:4, 5, ***But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.*** And so we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, ***God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***

On Christmas Day, please pause to consider your relationship with God. The good news of Christmas is that God has taken the initiative in your salvation and in mine. He has come to us in His Son so that in Him, the Lord Jesus, we might come to Him. That's where repentance and faith come into it. You and I are to acknowledge our sin and turn from it. That's repentance. And we're to trust that when Christ died on the cross He died for you and for me. That's faith. I urge you, if you have not done so, to place your faith in Christ.

Very briefly, we can apply the Incarnation in two more ways.

1. The fact that in Christ God took on human flesh shows us the value of human existence. As the hymn writer notes, *He abhors not the virgin's womb* [O Come All Ye Faithful].

2. The Lord Jesus identifies with and understands us in our weakness. He gave up the glory that He shared with the Father in heaven to take on our humanity. And so the Lord Jesus says to us this morning (Matthew 11:28-30), ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*** That too is God's grace.

I've barely touched the surface of meaning in John's opening verses. But we have the rest of John's Gospel to flesh them out. Meanwhile, it's not the light following us that's most important, even if it is the police. Instead, it's the light whom we follow. For, light has come into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, God's Son. John 1:14, ***The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

Amen

Prepared by Rev. Alan Every, Canterbury Presbyterian Church, Canterbury, Melbourne, Australia for use of the Canterbury congregation.