

Robert's Christmas

Robert woke early. It was Christmas morning. Quietly he crept down stairs. There it was under the tree, a big present for him. He could tell by the shape what it was. You can't hide the shape of a bike with wrapping paper. This was what he had been wanting for years. He started to peel back some of the paper to see what like. It was red and all shiny and new. It had the gears and speedo and headlight he wanted.

He looked at the bike for a while then sat in a chair. This was exactly what he had been asking for but it didn't make him happy. In fact he felt really miserable. Why was it his parents were always away at Christmas? His aunt and uncle were really kind to him but he longed to have Mum and Dad there so he could show them how well he could ride his bike. He wished they could have been there to see him at his football grand final when he scored the winning goal. He wished they could have gone on a holiday together this summer. He knew the card on the bike said "With all our love" and there were so many other good things they had given him. But these things didn't make up for the fact that they were never there to do things together, to watch him play football, to give him a hug when he felt sad - as he did now.

We long for close personal relationships, don't we? To share life with those who are important to us. It's not just kids. We all value family and friend and relationships. Christmas is all about a personal relationship with God.

1. The coming of Jesus shows that God is a personal God.

What is your idea of God? It is a big idea to get head around! Isn't it?

Some think of him as a force behind the universe. They look at the world and see how amazing it is. They realise there has to be something more than what we see. The world can't be just an accident, it's obviously planned. Life must have some purpose. But God remains a vague idea. God may seem remote, abstract, and impersonal. Bette Midler sang, "God is watching us from a distance." He is just out there somewhere.

But Jesus is God come as a person. This is really an amazing fact.

John begins his gospel calling Jesus "the Word"... of God.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (1:1)

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (1:14)

God's Word is his self-expression, God revealing himself.

Imagine you met someone you didn't know at church or down the street. You try to engage them in conversation. You want to get to know them but they say nothing. They won't speak. You can't get to know them, can you? It is as we speak that we reveal our thoughts, our values, what we like and dislike, our plans; we disclose our true selves.

Jesus is God's Word, God revealing himself to us.

John tells us the Word is one with God the Father in creating this amazing world and everything that exists.

He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (1:2-3)

If we want to know the God who made everything, here he is, God shows himself to us in Jesus - the Word.

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. (1:18)

“No one has ever seen God ...” That’s a problem isn’t it? We can’t see God. Would you like to see God, to have him roll back a cloud and show himself? One of Jesus’ disciples felt like that.

⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. (14:8-9)

Jesus is more than a prophet or guru, someone telling us about God. He IS God come as a human. *“The Word became flesh.” (1:14)*

And Jesus is fully personal. God is not some abstract power or life force he has shown himself to be personal. Jesus shows God’s love in coming and dying for us. Jesus calls the disciples his “friends” (15:14). He shows his care and compassion by healing the sick. He is God relating to us in love, person to person. So God is a personal God.

2. Jesus offers us a personal relationship with God

To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (1:12)

Stop and think how amazing this is - the God who made the universe, this big, almighty God wants us to be his children.

When my kids were young they invited their friends to our place to play. It was good to have these friends come over but we were glad when they went home. We never wanted the friends to become our children. We were very happy with our two children, they are very special to us, but we didn’t want any other children in our family circle. However God wants you to be his child, in that relationship with him!!

In the story I began with Robert wanted a closer relationship with his parents. He wanted them to be there with him. In Jesus, *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”* He came to live with us in this world.

Of course Jesus is no longer here physically, he returned to heaven. But before he went he said, *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (14:18)* Again he uses the picture of a parent. The parent doesn’t abandon his children as orphans. God is with us always by his Holy Spirit.

Jesus does more than reveal God so we can know about him. He offers us this relationship with God as our Father, a relationship with God now throughout this life and for eternity. Let it sink in!!

3. We enter this relationship by trusting Jesus.

We need to see that not everyone is a child of God. We have to become children of God. *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (1:12)*

We can only become children of God by receiving Jesus and believing in him. That means to truly trust him and follow him as disciples.

The first time we went to the Great Barrier Reef we went to Green Island. From there you can see the reef from a distance, see a few bits of coral sticking up at low tide. Next we went on a glass bottomed boat. We could look through glass and see coral and fish below but we were still looking from the outside.

The next day we went on a dive tour to the outer reef. We put on goggles, snorkels and flippers and dived in. We could then swim among the brightly coloured fish. We could see the colours of the corals and clams. It really was like entering and experiencing a different world.

It is like that with God. Some people think about God from a distance. Some may get closer and come to church and sing the songs. But it isn't till you dive in, until you come to know Jesus, trust in him and follow him that you come to experience a real relationship with God.

Jesus says, Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. (5:24)

This is a great promise: When we trust in Jesus we come to have a new life with God as Father both now and for eternity. We are forgiven and will not experience God's judgment.

It may be that some of you haven't made that step yet. You may have been looking from a distance but you haven't dived in. You haven't really put your trust in Jesus. If not take time to find out how you can do that. Read through one of the Gospels in the Bible, talk to us at church.

Many of us here have made that step. We know God as our heavenly Father but we need to keep living as his children. To us Jesus says,
⁵ *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (15:5)*

To be a child of God is an amazing privilege. We need to live out that relationship by staying close to Jesus.

At Christmas we celebrate the wonderful fact that God has revealed himself as a personal God who wants us to be part of his family. And he has opened the way for us to become his children through a living faith in Jesus.