

Christmas 2006 sermon
John 1; Isaiah 53

Merry Christmas!

** I've got a little Christmas trivia to begin with today.

** Do you know what year the first postage stamp to commemorate Christmas was issued? 1937. In Austria.

** Did you know the largest Christmas cracker ever made, until 1993, was over 45 metres long and 3 metres in diameter. It was made by an Australian rugby player – Ray Price – in New South Wales. It was pulled in the car park of the Westfield Shopping Town in Chatswood on 9th November 1991.

** Do you know the names of all Santa's reindeer?
Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen.

** Do you know why Christmas is sometimes shortened to Xmas?
X is the Greek letter Chi, which is the first letter of Christ's name in Greek.

** But I have one big question I really want to know the answer to: If you swallow tinsel, will you get tinselitis?

The passage we read from John this morning raises 3 big questions about how we understand what really happened on that first Christmas Day.

The first is from verse 5:

**** 1.** *"The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it."*

**** Question One:** Why is Jesus not understood?

John opens up by telling us the Christmas story in an unusual way. He doesn't speak about the virgin birth, or the magi, or the shepherds, or the stable. He talks about Jesus as "the Word" of God. He talks about the darkness of the world and Jesus as the light who came into the dark world. He talks about the word of God, the light of God, becoming flesh and living among us. This passage is all about God crossing the boundary between Heaven and earth. And the biggest question that raises is "WHY?" Why did God do this. And to put it simply, the world did not *understand*.

**** III** – Do you remember this song?

You better not shout.

You better not cry.

You better not pout, I'm telling you why;

Santa Claus is coming to town.

He knows when you've been sleeping

He knows when you're awake,

He knows if you've been bad or good,

So be good for goodness sake!

Why does Santa come? because you've been good. He's been watching you, and he's coming with presents if you're good.

This really sums up what a lot of people might think about **God** at Christmas – it's about being good. Perhaps for many, God is like a cosmic Santa Claus. He watches us all the time. He knows everything we do. And that's true. God does see everything we do. But does he tell us to be good or he won't give us anything?

Imagine if God was like that. Imagine if he only gave us things if we were good? Let me suggest to you that if that were the case, we would get nothing! Our world has great difficulty *understanding* Jesus, because God gave us Jesus to save us, even though he tells us we were **not** good.

Romans 3: (10-12) actually says:

****** *“There is no-one righteous, not even one. There is no-one who understands, no-one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no-one who does good, not even one.”*

Even the passage in Isaiah we read this morning said:

****** *“each of us has turned to his own way.”* (53:6)

If God only gave us things when we were good, we would have nothing! But God doesn't reward us for being good. God is motivated by LOVE. God gives us Jesus ***even though*** we don't deserve him.

God's love for us is unconditional. It's un-expected love. It's the love of a ***true*** Father.

WHY is the gift of Jesus at Christmas is so hard to ***understand***? Because God's love for us is so great, it's beyond our expectations.

The second thing we hear from John is in verse 10:

**** 2.** He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him.

**** Question 2:** WHY did the world not ***recognise*** Jesus?

**** III** – OK. Does anyone know what this is? What is it and what is it used for?
This is the **Webb Adder calculator**, from the late 1800's.



It's not easy to recognise this as a calculator today! It's not what we expect. These days we expect something flat with numbers on it. And since most of us don't recognise this, we don't know what it's purpose is.

Even though Jesus was with God in the beginning, and the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him when he arrived. And it's easy to see why when we look back at that passage from Isaiah. This is a prophecy that speaks about God's King who will come to rescue his people. 53:2:

****** *“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”*

God became man. No wonder the world didn't recognise him. When God sent his King, he didn't send a Superman, which I guess many people were expecting. Someone with super powers to overthrow the government of the time. Someone with the strength to lead God's people to victory and take their land back from the Romans. No. God became man. An ordinary looking man. And he went through life like we do. Except without sin. And he didn't lead with a strong arm, but with a servant heart. And although he could heal the sick and raise the dead and walk on water, he didn't choose to save the world through a military victory, but by sacrificing himself. Isaiah 53:5 says:

****** *“But he was pierced for our transgressions (sins)*

He was crushed for our iniquities;(sins)

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him,

And by his wounds we are healed.”

Why was Jesus not recognised as a King? Because he was a King who became a ***servant***, even to the point of dying to take the punishment for our sins. The world did not recognise Jesus as King because he was a King who laid down his life for his people. A King of love. A King of sacrifice. A King of service. An unexpected King.

Finally, let's look at verse 11:

**** 3.** He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

**** Question 3:** Why was Jesus not received?

**** III** – present

I have a gift here. (Gift is given to someone whom I do not know well)

You don't know me very well do you? And I imagine you're a little surprised by that gift. Although it is Christmas, so it's not *really* weird – just a little weird!

I don't think many of us will be surprised if we receive gifts this Christmas. We may be surprised if we DON'T receive a gift. But Christmas is a time of giving. AND it is a time of receiving. I'm so glad you took that gift when I gave it to you! Otherwise, well, I would have looked like a bit of an idiot. But it's a bit strange, isn't it? You don't really know me. Yet I gave you a gift and you received it.

And it's difficult to comprehend at Christmas – that when we were so far away from God in our lives, every one of us, God actually reaches out to us and says: “I want to give you the gift of my son”. And we might say things like “But I don't understand! Why would you give me something so incredible after the way I've treated you?” And God's answer is simple. “Because I love you. Now take it. **Receive** the gift.”

And I think that's the hardest part for us as humans. To accept something that we don't deserve. From someone we have turned our hearts against. Because receiving the gift of Jesus actually means understanding how much God loves us, and recognising that he is the King who we need in our lives, even though we don't deserve him. And it's even harder to receive that gift when we don't have anything worthwhile to offer back.

Just listen to what the Bible says about this in Ephesians 2:8-9:

****** *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the **gift** of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast.”*

Because of God's grace, we have been given a free and undeserved gift. And God simply asks us to receive it.

WHY do people not receive Jesus? Perhaps because it's so hard to receive something we know we really don't deserve. Or perhaps we just don't want to admit that we need him.

Conclusion:

I guess today some of us will probably expect to receive some gifts. I do! There's a bit of an expectation at Christmas that you might be given something. But at Christmas, the gift we really need to remember is the unexpected gift. The gift we don't expect. The gift we don't deserve. The gift given to us by God even when we had turned our hearts against him. And it also happens to be the most precious gift in the world. The life of Jesus. And the death of Jesus for our sins. So we could have the ultimate gift of eternal life.

****** It's difficult to **understand** how God could love us this much. But he does.

****** It's difficult to **recognise** Jesus as a King when he came to serve us and to die for us. But he is King.

****** And it's difficult to **receive** that gift because it's hard to accept something so valuable when we simply don't deserve it. But God wants us to receive eternal life through Jesus as his gift to us.

So much about Christmas is unexpected. But that's really what Christmas celebrates. The unexpected. The unexpected **love** of God that is so great. An unexpected King that came to **serve**. And God's unexpected **gift** that we simply don't deserve, but he so wants us to have.

I'd like to finish by praying for us all now: God, help us to **understand** your love more and more this Christmas. Help us to **recognise** Jesus as King in our lives in all that we do. And help us to freely **receive** the gift of eternal life through Jesus by accepting him as our saviour. Amen.