

Sermon – Port Macquarie – 4th January 2009:

In the beginning:

Given by Micheal Perrott:

John 1:1 – 19

One day when a father came home, he sat down to relax and read the paper. His son had other ideas. The playful boy continually pestered his father.

The frustrated father tired of his son's nagging and took a page of the paper with a picture of the world and tore it into pieces.

"So, go into the other room and put the world back together. Moments latter the boy returned for he had taped the world back together.

The surprised father asked, "how did you do that so quickly?"

"It was easy," said the boy. "You see, on the other side of the world was a picture of a man, and as soon as I got the man straightened out, the world was OK too!"

Perhaps the way to fix our broken world, a world that has been shattered into a million pieces by the deadly hammer of sin, is to put the broken man and women back together first.

To put the broken back together we need have a beginning.

When we look into a dictionary we see that one of the meanings of the word begin or beginning is – "the point of time or space at which anything begins: *the beginning of the Christian era; the beginning of the route.*"

A few days ago we recognised the beginning of a new year, with all its possibilities, dreams, hopes and plans. Many of us have tried to make a change to our life by making a new years resolution, this too is a beginning in you life, a new day in the way you do things.

In the book of Genesis we read the words, "In the beginning God created...." signaling the start of life for the planet earth as we know it. It is these same words "In the beginning" that we read in our Gospel from John. This also signaled a new start, a new start in the relationship between God & Mankind.

These words form part of what is termed as the prologue to Johns Gospel, just a most books we read have a prologue, and it puts in a nutshell the theme of John's gospel, that Jesus was the Christ.

This relationship between God and mankind/humankind had become damaged through disobedience and the failure of mankind to acknowledge God as their only God. In the Ten Commandments we read "I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other God's but me". Yet mankind had and still does make gods of money, status, and power etc, even to making their places of worship an item of worship.

God made many attempts throughout history by sending his messengers – the Prophets - to bring humans back into a right relationship with him. His chosen people – the Israelites – were supposed to be an example for the rest of the world yet they still got it wrong, especially the religious leaders who lived in opulent

luxury at the expense of the people. Also they had turned the Temple of God from a place of worship to a thing of worship and a symbol of their power.

So God by his immeasurable grace, decided to send his son in the form of a human baby – Jesus – so that the way could be made for people to repent and change their lives and bring restoration in their relationship with God. There was a move from the national level to the personal with each person being called to return to him.

Thus Jesus was born as a human baby in a manger in the town of Bethlehem about a day's walk from Jerusalem. There are at least 80 recorded occurrences of Jesus in history, thus showing his humanity.

But what of his claim to be the Son of God – his divinity?

The people of his day crucified him because they claimed that he was being blasphemous making this claim, and people around the world still struggle with this claim of Jesus.

Yet the bible states in John 1:1 “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God.” In introducing Jesus in this way as the word, the logos of God, John is pointing out that his prologue to his gospel is not about a message that offers hope, but about the message that is the only hope. It is not about an idea, but a person.

In verse 14 we read that “the Word became Flesh and made his dwelling among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

This tells us that God is intent on communicating with us not about mere concepts, rather that he is intent on communicating about himself. The word became flesh tells us that the Message of Salvation is accessible to all, and was lived in the world and was heard and touched by many. It also tells us that Jesus was not a mere mortal, nor just an inspired carpenter, or a model human. It tells us that Jesus was God himself – taking on the clothing of humanity, embracing it fully and eternally, walking in it, speaking in it, and delivering the reality of God to the world in a manner never done before.

The prologue also tells us that something definitive has happened in time, something objective and absolute. A marker has been placed in human history, and all humanity is now being called mark time and progress by that post. This is the great mystery many struggle with, and so because we cannot see the invisible God, we reject the great Christmas truth – that we may receive, even right now, grace upon grace from Jesus Christ for this is what is revealed in John.

The first step in understanding this is to acknowledge that God is invisible and that we cannot see him in a physical sense.

Secondly we can see that God revealed himself in the Law of Moses before he revealed himself in the Lord Jesus. Verses 16 & 17.....show that rather than dismissing the Law, that the embodiment of grace and truth came through Jesus. A witness to that reality came through the Law of Moses. Jesus himself said that he came to fulfill the Law. In other words God made himself visible through the Law as a precursor to the revelation of himself in Jesus.

The next step in understanding this passage from John, which is in reality a condensed version of his whole gospel message, is that God became human, for if

the Word was God, and the Word became flesh, than God became flesh. God became human – Jesus Christ was human and Jesus Christ was God.

Our reading then tells us that the word dwelt amongst us. The word used for dwelt in the Greek is that for “set up a tent” and it implies that God wants to be on familiar terms with each of us. This setting up of a tent is used in a way that shows permanency, a long stay, like forever, which is usually the case when one dwells. So God wants to be close to us, to interact with us on a daily basis.

If you come into a community and build a huge house with a locked security fence around it, it says a lot about your desire to meet with people. If you pitch a tent in a friend’s back yard you will probably eat with them, use their bathroom and socialize with them. This why God became human. He came to pitch a tent in our human backyard so that we can have a lot to do with him.

What this shows us is that God came to live in a tent so that we can watch him more closely for God wants to be seen and known in his Son. So that you and I not longer need to be in the dark about God for when you see Jesus in action, you see God in action. When you hear Jesus teach, you hear God teach and when you come to know what Jesus is like you get to know what God is like.

The point of all this is that the essence of what God reveals about himself in Jesus is first and foremost, that he is true – that is he is real, more real than all that your eyes can see. Secondly it reveals that God is grace or as John puts it in his first letter: “God is love” (1Jn 4:8). It also reveals that God is free to all, and overflowing and lavish in his goodness to sinful creatures, us humans. This is grace and this is the essence of God’s reality and nothing reveals his deity more than the freedom of his Grace. For without this grace we would all face his judgment and eternal punishment. God doesn’t need you and me for he is sufficient unto himself, but he wants you and me to be in a relationship with him, now that’s Grace and it is revealed in Jesus the Christ – God’s one and only Son.

This brings us a practical Christmas truth. That God took the initiative and chose to come to earth in human form, and to reveal himself to us, which is amazing in itself, not just to show us grace, but to give us grace, grace in abundance, however we must receive it for it is God’s Christmas gift to us.

John Newton, a former slave trader received the gift of Grace, the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation of his soul, and received/accepted it. It affected him so much that amongst many good songs he wrote “Amazing Grace” and as such shared the grace he had received in abundance.

If you had received a gift on Christmas day and left it wrapped under the tree or sitting on a shelf it is not going to gain you much. So it is with God’s gift of unmerited grace, for he wants you to receive it and experience it this Christmas season and each day which follows. He wants to give you personally a foundation of truth and reality to stand firm on when things cave in around you. He wants to treat you with grace and forgive all your sins, each and every one of them, to make your slate clean again, to give you strength and fill each day you have with joy and peace.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9 we read ⁹ but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

John Newton found that God’s grace revealed in Jesus the Christ was sufficient for him, we just have to accept it and allow it to flow over and through us.

Also God wants us to share this grace with others through forgiveness, compassion, love of others and the preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ.

So to receive this gift of grace we all need to look beyond the manger and the human and see the divine nature revealed through Jesus and accept Jesus as God's son, casting all doubt aside, accept both his human nature and his divine nature as being true, allow the word that was there at the beginning to speak to your soul, make him lord of your life and receive the salvation that Jesus brings.

Then we can all enjoy a new beginning in our lives and the close intimate relationship with our heavenly father that he wants to have with us this Christmas season and each and every day.

In the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit:

Micheal Perrott