

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors on staff here at North Shore Alliance Church. I want to add my welcome to what has already been expressed by Paul and Anne; I'm glad you're here, and my prayer is that God will speak to you, meet you, and bless you today.

illus: I want to begin my sermon this morning by sharing a childhood experience of waiting for Christmas. Waiting is difficult for everyone, but particularly for small, eager, children, and particularly during the lead up to Christmas.

We waited until we began playing Christmas themed music—not until after December 1st. We waited for Dad to find a spare moment to put the lights up outside, we waited for the evening when we'd all pile into the station wagon, drive down to the Christmas tree lot to select our Christmas tree. Every year we waited for Mom's gingerbread, Nanaimo bars, and chocolates to be done.

My brother's and I weren't always good boys—certainly not when it came to waiting—and so my parents would buy our presents in advance, wrap them, and hide them somewhere in the house. My parents were concerned that if the presents were placed under the tree too early, we would poke, prod, and shake them, trying to figure out what we were getting. They were right of course—that's exactly what we would have done, and did do whenever we had the opportunity—and so, we had to wait until Christmas Eve for the presents to be placed under the tree.

Some families wake up on Christmas morning, the parents grab their coffee, and then everyone gathers around the tree to open presents—not our family, we had to wait. First my mom would make a

breakfast fit for royalty, and after breakfast we'd wait some more—before presents were opened, our family would attend the Christmas Day service at our church.

When we got home, we knew the waiting was nearly over, but before we opened presents, every year, my Dad would open his Bible to Luke 2 and read to us the story of Jesus' birth. The funny thing is, I can hardly remember a single Christmas present I received from my parents, but I will never forget the story.

Luke 2:4-7 says, "*Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*"

Even as a young boy, I knew what Christmas was all about. The trees, the baking, the presents, were just window dressing; listening to this story, for our family, was a holy and sacred moment. Think of it friends—God became human! Emmanuel, *God with us!*

This morning I'm going to begin a Christmas series entitled, *Why God Became Human*. In the next three weeks we're going to focus on the theology and implications of the incarnation; before I get to this morning's sermon, I want to set the stage for our series. The story that captivated me as boy, continues to captivate me today—for the last 18 months I have been reading, studying, and writing on the

incarnation and I want to share some of my joy with you in the coming weeks.

Put quite simply, the doctrine of the incarnation is that God the Son—Co-Eternal, Co-Equal, with the Father and the Spirit—became human without ceasing to be God. There was a moment in time, when God the Son stepped into human history as a human being—He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, within Mary's womb, gestated for 40 weeks (give or take), and was born in Bethlehem.

If you ever study history of doctrine, you will discover that not everyone believed what I've articulated concerning Jesus—some well-meaning Christians questioned whether He was really human.

- Docetists argue that in Jesus we have **God pretending to be a man**—it was simply an elaborate disguise.
- Apollinarianists argue that in Jesus we have **God in a man**; as if God took over a body to make it do His bidding, in much the same way as a puppeteer might control a puppet.

At the centre of Christian orthodoxy is the confession that in Jesus Christ we do not see God pretending to be a man, or God in a man, but God **as a man**. In Jesus Christ we have **One Person** with **Two Natures—God and man**; these two natures perfectly exist within Christ “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.”¹

I like to think that my passion for the doctrine of the incarnation is for good reason. Without being the least bit dramatic, if we abandon this doctrine the New Testament falls apart, the gospel breaks down,

and we are still dead in our sins—without hope for this life or the next. The ongoing humanity of Jesus matters!

Plenty of well-meaning Christians, in discussing the incarnation, become reductionistic, saying things like, “*Jesus was born to die.*” It's a catchy slogan, and contains some truth no doubt, but all in all it's really poor theology. Dallas Willard once joked that some Christians have a lot in common with vampires—they only want Jesus for His blood. Jesus's death on the cross was preceded by 33 years of living—the life He lived cannot be separated from the death He died; His whole life was an atoning sacrifice.

The incarnation does speak to the issue of salvation, but it also holds profound implications for what it means to be human. Issues concerning worship, prayer, faith, obedience, and life in the Spirit are made clear in the humanity of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the incarnation also speaks to matters such as gender equality, sexuality, body image, and right to life questions surrounding abortion and euthanasia.

I want to begin our series this morning by preaching about Jesus as the ultimate, decisive, and final word about God. When people say that they don't believe in God, a good question to ask is, “Which God don't you believe in?” You may get a blank stare in response, but they might begin to describe a grandfatherly like being, old, kind, slightly confused, but good for a hug and some help if we find ourselves in a pinch. Truth be told, I don't believe in that kind of God either.

¹ Chalcedonian Creed.

The agnostic is quick to acknowledge that while God may exist, nothing can be known of His existence or nature. Even those who do believe in God often carry a vague, ill-defined notion of who God is. God's self-communication, or, revelation, is what separates theology from mythology—only God can reveal God.

Jesus Christ—the Eternal Son of God made Man—is the decisive word about God. God became Man so that God could be known—it's the Incarnation that makes real, true, knowledge of God possible.

If you have your Bible with you this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to John 1, beginning in verse 1; if you are using the Blue Bible located in the seat rack in front of you, you can find our text on page _____.

The first recorded words in the Bible are found in Genesis 1:1, "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" John picks up on these words but directs our attention to the time before time. He writes, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*"

John introduces us to the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, referring to Him as "**the Word**." And what does John tell us about this "**Word**"?

² Colossians 1:15-20, and Hebrews 1:1-4 also speaks about His preexistence, and work.

³ Leon Morris, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of John*, 66.

a) First, the Word is pre-existent. In other words, God the Son, the Word, has always been: there was never a time when He was not.²

b) Second, John tells us that this Word was *with* God. The literal translation from the original Greek into English would read, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was towards God,*" or, "*and the Word was face to face with God.*" The Word was *towards* God, the Father and the Son were *face to face*; it's a description of the closest possible relationship.

Vs. 1 concludes with five simple words: *and the Word was God*. You may be wondering why John uses the term "Word" for God the Son? One scholar has been helpful to me in understanding this term; he suggests that our words are a means by which we reveal ourselves, what we are think, and what we are like.³ Jesus is God's Divine Word, the clearest possible revelation of who God is.

And while the Word has always been God, there was a moment in history when He did become flesh and blood. God the Son became one of us. He came to be with us. He came to reveal God to us.

In vs. 4-5 we read, "*In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*"

Through Jesus, everyone and everything has been given life. In Jesus we see the life **of** God, we see God's life **for** us, God's life **with** us, and for all who receive Him, we experience God's life **in** us. Jesus is the life-bringer. If you are in need of a second chance at life, look no further than Jesus; He is, He has, what you need.

But John also describes Jesus as light, and in so doing he awakens a world of meaning. What does it mean to say that Jesus is *the light that shines in the darkness*? The *inextinguishable light*? The *true light that gives light to everyone*?

Jesus reveals God, and at the very same time He exposes humanity. Our experience of light is very different from Jesus' first century experience. We can turn on a light with the flip of a switch, but for Jesus, apart from the light of the sun and moon, light was always accompanied by flame—light and heat were intimately linked. The one exposes, the other purifies.

illus: When I grew up, I loved playing with fire. I loved using a magnifying glass to focus a ray of light until it produced fire. I loved mixing gasoline and fire. But my favourite by far was using an aerosol can and a lighter to produce a flame thrower (**demonstrate**).

One afternoon when I was 15, a friend and I gathered all the flammable liquid we could find and dumped it down an overflow drain at the back of my house. Our plan was to drop a lit match down the drain and see if we could produce a flame to shoot out of the drain.

Rob lit the first match and dropped it, and we stood back—nothing happened. I encouraged Rob to drop another—he dropped a second

lit match, we stood back, but nothing happened. Puzzled, we wondered aloud about whether we needed more flammable liquid. Rob bent over the hole with a quizzical look on his face; I remember the look because it was soon illuminated by a 4-foot-flame—a flame that singed hair, eyebrows and lashes, but not skin.

Light reveals, heat purifies—Jesus reveals the ultimate, decisive, and **final living word** about God's being, purpose, and action in the world. John 1:14, and 18 says, "*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...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.*"

Let's take a quick look at another passage that highlights the revelatory role of Jesus. Hebrews 1:1-3 says, "*In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*"

Jesus' revelation stands apart and above previous revelation by virtue of His unique relationship to the Father. God has spoken in the past, at various times, through various prophets, but now through His Son, God has spoken a final, ultimate, decisive word. Here in Hebrews 1, Jesus' relationship with the Father is described in two ways: He is the radiance (**reflection**) of God's glory, and, the exact representation (**stamp**) of His being. Jesus' words, being, and action reflect the words, being, and action of God.

This is why Jesus could make statements like Matthew 11:27, “*No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*” In John 12:45 Jesus said, “*The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me;*” in John 14:9 Jesus said, “*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.*”

Application: In the time remaining, I want to demonstrate how the Incarnation answers some of life’s biggest questions, beginning with the first...

1. Who is God? In seeking knowledge, our method of inquiry needs to fit the nature of the reality being investigated. If we want to know the physical properties of gold, we can use our senses to observe things such as colour, it’s freezing, boiling, or melting point, its density, hardness, etc. The nature of the reality being investigated determines the method of inquiry.

So, how does one investigate a God that is above us, beyond us, and unlike us? Since only God can know himself, only God can make himself known. In the Incarnation, Jesus has spoken a decisive word about who God is. Scottish theologian, Thomas Torrance, writes, “In Jesus Christ the Son of God took our human nature upon himself and made it his own so completely that he came among us *as man*; and by what he was *as man*, he revealed to us what he was and is *as God*.”⁴

So what has Jesus made known about God?

In Jesus we see a God who became human so that He could bear our weakness, disappointment, sin, shame, and death. In Jesus Christ we discover a God who loves. In fact, speaking, revelation, is itself an act of love—God calls to us because He longs for relationship with us.

Can anyone tell me, in the earthly ministry of Jesus, how did He most commonly refer to God? Not only did He call God “Father,” but in Luke 15 He told a story about a Father in order to describe what God is like. God is not a cold, distant, angry, or unforgiving Father; He’s a loving, forgiving, faithful, and generous Father.

John 3:16-17 describes God’s relationship to the world in the following way, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*”

In the Incarnation, God the Son became human, not to get His revenge, or hand out a bunch of “I told you so’s,” but to rescue, to heal, to express God’s love for the world. *If you want to know who God is and what matters to Him, look to Jesus.*

Let’s turn our attention to a second big question:

2. Who am I? We’re going to look at this question in detail next week, but allow me to offer a brief answer this morning.

⁴ T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 55.

Who are we? Human beings have been made in God's image, set apart for relationship with Him, and destined to participate in His rule on the earth. But while we have been made for relationship, ironically, the human race is marked by division, strife, and envy. We live in God's good world, but because of sin, the world is profoundly broken and we along with it.

The solution to the brokenness of humanity is found in the Incarnation. If we think that God doesn't have a clue about how hard life can be, or what it's like to suffer loss, to be hurt, misunderstood, and rejected, look no further than the Lord Jesus Christ. He didn't live a privileged, sterilized, human life; Jesus stepped right into the muck and mire. The Creator drew near as Redeemer—God has acted through Jesus to restore what has been lost through sin, to reclaim the image of God in humanity; Jesus is the Truly Human One.

And so, *if you want to know who you are meant to be, look to Jesus.*

Perhaps you're asking a different sort of question this morning, something more along the lines of...

3. Why am I here? Every human I have ever met is hungry for purpose and meaning; many are desperate to discover what they are good at, where they should live, what career they should choose, who they should marry, etc. Answers to these questions are important, but not primary—they cannot satisfy the soul's hunger for purpose.

We have been created **by** God and His desire is to know you, to love you, and for you to respond to His love with your whole life. The Scriptures speak of the love of God the Father (2 Cor 13:14), mediated through Christ the Son (1 John 3:16), and applied to our

hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Jesus was once asked for His opinion on the greatest commandment in the Law; without hesitation He replied, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*"

This morning I want to invite you to **receive** God's love. His love is the atmosphere we breathe, it's the ground of our being, and **this Triune love calls to us, inviting us to respond in love.**

In the Incarnation we see the Truly Human One, Jesus, centering His whole life upon God the Father. At His baptism, the Father named and blessed Him; throughout Jesus' ministry He regularly turned aside to pray and listen to the Father. Where He went, what He said and did, all of it was aligned with what Jesus saw the Father doing and heard the Father saying.

Because we've been made **by** God, and **for** God, we cannot find purpose apart **from** God—we can try making our own meaning in life, but it won't satisfy our soul's hunger.

If you want to know why you're here, you'll find the answer by looking to Jesus.

Conclusion: As I conclude this morning, I want to invite you to receive God's love—we have been created **by** God and His desire is to know you, to love you, and for you to respond to His love with your whole life.

God the Son became human to reveal a love without limits. The chief longing of His heart is for you to know this love, to receive it,

celebrate it, enjoy it—all that He has done, all that He has given and accomplished, is for you. Will you turn to Him today?

Pray