

1 Jn 1:1-4 Hidden Christmas

Tim Anderson 12/12/2021

We've been looking at the hidden meanings of Christmas.

And today there's no question that it's hidden.

Most people would look at this passage and say,

"This is not a Christmas passage."

That's how hidden it is.

So let me first justify to you that this is a Christmas passage.

It starts a bit like a riddle out of the Hobbit.

"Alive without breath,

as cold as death,

all in mail, never clinking,

never thirsty, ever drinking."

What's the answer?

It's a fish.

If you don't get it,

ask the person next to you afterwards.

Here's John's riddle.

"That which was from the beginning,

which we have heard,

which we have seen with our eyes,

which we have looked at

and our hands have touched -"

What is it?

Or rather, who is it?

Someone who was around in the beginning.

Someone John has heard, seen and touched.

Well no prizes for guessing who he's talking about.

Yes it's Jesus.

He says, "This we proclaim to you concerning the word of life."

Alright, he's not saying straight out that it's Jesus.

He's saying it 'the word of life'.

But that hasn't really put us off the scent, has it?

We know that John's gospel begins with the words,

"In the beginning was the word,

and the word was with God,
and the word was God,
he was with God in the beginning."
We know that's about Jesus.
So we already know that that John calls Jesus 'the word'.
Not just the word,
but he was with God in the beginning.
The gospel passage continues,
"In him was life and that life was the light of all mankind."
OK so Jesus is the word who has life in him.
And here we are looking for someone called 'the word of life'.
It's not rocket science to make the connection, is it?
So we've got 'word' - tick.
'from the beginning' - tick.
'life' - tick.
It's someone who John has heard, seen and touched.
Yep, it's about Jesus.

The next verse begins with these words,
"The life appeared."
Now we already know that the life is Jesus.
Jesus appeared.
When did Jesus appear?
Christmas time.
So it's a Christmas passage.
You might never have heard it read out in church at Christmas.
That doesn't mean it's not a Christmas passage.
That just means preachers find it a bit of a struggle convincing folks
that it's worth preaching on passages
that don't have angels, shepherds and wise men at Christmas.
But it has Jesus appearing on earth.
So it's fair game in my book.

And here's the claim.
It has a hidden meaning of Christmas.
What's the hidden meaning of Christmas?

The hidden meaning of Christmas

is that you can have fellowship with God.

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard,
so that you also may have fellowship with us.

And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard."

Well we know what that is.

He already said that he had seen and heard Jesus.

He proclaims Jesus to them.

The benefit is that then John and his readers
will be able to have fellowship together.

We'll leave aside what fellowship actually means for a minute.

But let's just piece together what he's saying.

Because John proclaims Jesus to his readers,
he and the readers can have fellowship together.

The message is that John proclaims Jesus to his readers.

His readers put their faith in Jesus.

And then as a result of John's readers becoming Christians,
John and his readers have fellowship together.

There's this funny thing called fellowship
that before John's readers were Christians,

John couldn't have with them,

but now he can have it.

But not only does John have fellowship with them,
now both John and his readers have fellowship with God.

Now for the Pentecostals out there,
fellowship with God includes the Holy Spirit.

Just because John says,

"Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ,"
doesn't mean that John has forgotten the Holy Spirit.

It doesn't mean

that John thinks you can have fellowship with the Father and the Son
but not the Holy Spirit.

It doesn't mean that John is one of the frozen chosen
who needs the fire of the Holy Spirit to empower his faith.

It just means that when John says one of the members of the Trinity,
he means all of them,
because there is one God.
And the Holy Spirit is less spoken of
because his job is to point people to Jesus.
But Yes to the relief of all the Pentecostals,
you can have fellowship with God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The hidden meaning of Christmas.
Jesus has appeared,
which means that you can have fellowship with God.
Which leaves us with the question of what fellowship is.
Here's something it can't possibly be.
It can't possibly be a cup of tea and a biscuit while chatting after church.
Because you can't have a cup of tea and a biscuit
and a chat with God after church.
So what is this fellowship
that John and his readers have with each other and God?
Well here's a recent story from Holy Trinity
to explain what fellowship is.
A few weeks ago we had a working bee
to take out some scrubby bushes and trees
and an old broken down bit of fence.
About half a dozen of us were working together on this little project.
And when we got to the end
we could stand back and look at the nicely cleaned up bit of land,
and say, "Look what we achieved together."
That's a bit of a picture of fellowship.
Working together on some goal that you are united about.
It's not just the work itself.
It's the unity you have with the other people you are working with.
Working together on something
actually builds a relationship between you.
I remember my first job.
It was the summer holidays after I finished year 12.
I had a couple of months until uni started.

And I had nothing I needed to do.
The man who lived around the corner from our place
offered me a job in his factory.
His factory made LPG gas tanks to go in cars.
My job was in the store, working with 3 other guys.
We took the tanks and loaded them onto trucks
to go wherever they went.
So I worked at this job for 2 months.
It wasn't a long term job for me.
Definitely not a career path.
Something to fill in time and earn some pocket money.
My last day came.
And as I was walking from the store to the car for the last time.
It would have been a couple of hundred metres walk,
I cried and cried.
18 year old, rarely shows his emotions, future mathematician.
But overcome with emotion
because I was losing this sense of togetherness
that comes from working together with other people on a common goal.
You could fairly say that I was mourning the loss of fellowship.

Now fellowship doesn't have to be work.
You could be at the cricket.
Imagine being at the Gabba this week.
Australia destroying the English batsmen.
Would have been a great place to be.
Now you could just go and sit in the stands and watch.
But if you put on your green and gold zinc cream
and go and sit with the other people wearing green and gold zinc cream,
and shout together the same chants of encouragement to your players
and derision to Poms,
then you would get this sense of fellowship.
Now it's pretty shallow.
It won't last long after you leave the stadium.
But there is a contrived fellowship there.
Enough so that you might give a complete stranger a high five

when an English wicket falls.
Which was 10 times on the first day, just saying.

So what is the fellowship that Christians share?
Well we are working together following Jesus.
Just like when you are at a working bee,
you are striving alongside other people with the same goal in mind.
The goal is building God's Kingdom.
Just like me working at the LPG gas tank factory,
you feel this sense of closeness with those who work alongside you.
I can go on holidays and turn up to a random church
with people I've never met before,
and feel a strong sense of unity with these brothers and sisters.
Why so? I've never met them before.
Because we share a common bond through our faith in the Lord Jesus.
This is a far stronger bond than you share
with people who support the same sporting team as you
or with people who work alongside of you in your job.
This bond is one that lasts forever.
Beyond the grave.
We will be united with these people for eternity.

But the fellowship that John is talking about is even better than that.
This is a fellowship that is between us and God.
"Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."
How do we have fellowship with God?
The root of the word for fellowship is 'sharing'.
It means a relationship of mutual sharing.
We don't just know about God.
We know God in a personal way.
And we are known by God in a personal way.
We all like it when our stories are listened to.
You can tell that by how strong the temptation to interrupt can be
when someone else is telling their story.
We have our own story that we want to insert into the conversation.
And it can be very frustrating when you are having a conversation

with someone who always has to be the one telling the story.
They're never interested in your story.
God is always interested in hearing your story.
You can tell him your story and he will never get bored.
He won't interrupt.
Prayer can be a lot more than a shopping list.

And if you've got space in your life for his story,
well he's written it down in the Bible.
When we are with people we love,
we actually want to hear their stories.
We're not bored by them because we want to get to know them better.
You can get to know God better in a personal way
by listening to his story.
We find out what makes people tick,
what makes them annoyed,
what their passions are,
where their sense of fun is
all by listening to them.
You can get to know God in the same way.

Evangelicals have traditionally used language like,
"Having a personal relationship with God."
and "Inviting Jesus into your heart".
Some people shy away from that kind of language.
They find it an overly familiar way
to talk about the holy God who created the universe.
Maybe their faith is focused on believing the truths of the Scriptures.
But I think God wanted us to be personal and familiar with him.
Jesus calls his disciples 'friends'.
He tells them they are not servants anymore.
They are friends.
There has to be a familiarity and intimacy that comes with that.
And the hidden meaning of Christmas in today's passage,
is that Jesus has appeared to us,
and so we can have fellowship with God.

I think that means a personal relationship with God.

Now what is the result of a personal relationship with God?

1:4 John says, "We write this to make our joy complete."

I'm not exactly sure what he means by this.

My guess is that his personal fellowship with God gives him great joy, but when he proclaims what he has seen and heard to his readers and they have personal fellowship with God too, then his joy will be complete.

In any case, this much at least we can say with confidence.

John thinks the result of a personal relationship with God is joy.

The angels said the same thing to the shepherds.

Lk 2:10 "I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

And notice that in line with our theme of a personal relationship, the shepherds went and became personally acquainted with the Saviour who was born that day.

The didn't only hear the news.

They also went and checked it out for themselves.

The Bible doesn't tell us

if Mary was giving out cuddles of the new born baby.

But if she was, the shepherds were first in the queue.

And cuddling a new born baby will bring joy to hardest of hearts.

Isaac Watts puts it this way.

"Joy to the world, the Lord is come.

Let earth receive her king.

Let every heart, prepare him room."

No question in that carol,

that Joy comes because of the appearing of Jesus.

And the appearing of Jesus results in fellowship with God, which Isaac Watts expresses as our hearts preparing him room.

That sounds a lot like inviting Jesus into your heart,

some centuries before it became an evangelical cliché.

How can we kindle that joy in our hearts?

Of course it should be a joy that is confined to Christmas time.

Our fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ is available all year.

The point of Christmas is to remind us to spend some time reflecting on the coming of the Lord Jesus.

But the results of that coming should be with us always.

But at this time of year, I think singing some Christmas carols is a great way to kindle the joy of the Saviours coming in our hearts.

I quoted "Joy to the World" a moment ago.

But a bunch of the carols express

the wonder of God appearing among us.

And if you have their words going around in your head,

then they must kindle your joy.

O little town of Bethlehem.

"How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!

So God imparts to human hearts

the blessings of his heaven."

Hark the Herald angels Sing.

"Joyful all ye nations rise,

join the triumph of the skies."

"O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant."

There's joy laced in the Christmas carols

like brandy in a Christmas cake.

Don't forget to turn them on this Christmas.

But don't forget too what makes John's joy complete.

It's not just his own fellowship with Father and the Son.

It's his fellowship with his readers.

He proclaims the appearing of the word of life.

And then he has fellowship with the people he proclaimed it to.

In slight more simple language you could say,
he tells the Christmas story.

And then he shares the joy of those who like him a transformed by it.
The true meaning of Christmas is not a story to keep to yourself.
And the joy of others will kindle your own joy.