

What an incredible introduction which John gives to us about the existence of Christ in everything. It's a passage we hear every Christmas, specifically as the last reading in our Nine Lessons & Carols. It becomes so familiar to us that we lose so much of its meaning. So I'm just going to pick out 1 or 2 verses this morning which I think are applicable to us as we embark on a new year. Let me read again verses 10 & 11.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Have you ever stopped to think about those lines before. I hope you have. Because they should impact every fibre that is within you right now. Jesus was in the world, and though the world was made through Jesus, the world didn't recognise him. So Jesus has always been here. You know I think we've completely messed up how we teach our children theology when in Sunday School we paint this picture of a baby being born in a manger, and yes that is accurate, but we don't give our children the understanding that this baby has already been in existence from before creation. Yes he has come in human form, but he's God. If we portray his existence beginning only two thousand years ago then we limit Jesus to person, and

not God in human form, and therefore it affects how we consider the significance of the Gospel.

Long before His virgin birth, Jesus was in existence. From Genesis 1 He was already ruling, He was ordering and governing the whole of His creation. Just before Christmas I led a bible study into the book of Colossians, and in Chapter 1 verse 17 Paul tells us that Jesus was before all things and it's through Jesus that everything holds together.

And yet even with this picture of Jesus being in existence for ever, we have a picture also of a humanity who does not recognise him. It's as if society has not welcomed him into the very world that he formed. For any of you that have had teenage children, you may understand that their bedrooms seem to be a place of no entry for parents. The other night I walked into Nathan's bedroom, and he asked me why was I in his bedroom. My response to him was this, 'because Son I own this house'. And I wonder today in our society where we think we have the right to doing our own thing, where everyone has the right to their own opinions, where many do not see the point in Jesus Christ, do we have the cheek to ask Jesus 'why are you in my space?', without recognising that Jesus can respond 'because I own everything and everything in existence is held together by me'. That's a humbling

thought as we move into a new year, where we have our dreams for what it would be, but have we taken the time to consider that we should be stepping in the will of Jesus our saviour and no one else.

The most amazing fact that we read here today is that even in the context of rejection and ignorance by humanity, Jesus came (verse 11). The one who was in existence before all things were created, the one who holds the stars in place in their galaxies, the one who formed you and me in our mother's wombs, comes. How incredible is that. But therefore the most tragic fact about this reading this morning is that even though he came, his own didn't receive him.

This will not be new to those long ago who would have read the Old Testament prophecies because the prophet Isaiah, speaking of Jesus said this (Isaiah 53:3), "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem".

The truth folks is that nothing has changed today. The Gospel message of Jesus is still rejected today. Even after a year such as 2020, after the many concerning issues that people have faced through the wide reaching impacts of Coronavirus, I am surprised and

dreadfully worried at how many people have not drawn closer to Jesus. You may think this morning that this only applies to those who do not believe the Gospel message and haven't given their lives to Christ i.e. those outside the church, but I'd like to challenge us all this morning by highlighting that the Church has walked away from Jesus by ignoring his guidance. Ironically and somewhat embarrassingly, when you look at the Christmas story it seems that the humble and lowly houseowner welcomed Mary & Joseph as Jesus was born, the humble and lowly shepherds welcomed Jesus - but the holy and religious people of God didn't welcome him. And behind rose tinted windows, and pretty buildings, the Church has in so many ways rejected Jesus – how? Well through its over indulgence in making sure the buildings are beautiful inside but ignoring the needs of the people outside.

Jesus clearly didn't come for the religious groups, he came for those who understood their need of a saviour. You may remember from our study of the book of Acts that Stephen criticises the religious Sanhedrin, calling them "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of

the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him”.

I worry that the Church today wants to have an association with Jesus (a bit like some kind of golf club membership), but the Church doesn't like it when it means it has to give up so much, to sacrifice much, and to follow him not just on a Sunday but every minute of our lives. It means reaching out into the community of Ballynure – now tell me when was the last time we did that? It means opening the doors to the poor. It means obeying God's direction for us as a Church even when it may mean difficult decisions – we must reject our own wants, however right they feel, and follow the will of God.

Whilst it's uncomfortable to hear it, are we willing to examine whether there are ways in which we have rejected Jesus in our lives? At the start of this new year have you taken the time yet to review your own life against what Jesus wills for you? I read about the great Scottish preacher Thomas Guthrie whose statue stands in Princes Street Gardens in Edinburgh, and as a gauge on which to consider our rejection of Jesus he quotes this, 'If you find yourself loving any pleasure better than your prayers, any book better than the Bible, any house better than the house of God, any table better than the Lord's Table, any persons better than Christ,

or any indulgence better than the hope of heaven, take alarm!'. Folks that's how we gauge whether or not we have received Jesus or not. Receiving Him is not just about your baptism or your Confirmation, it's not about how you serve in the Church, it's not about the evangelical language we use. Receiving Him is about receiving Him every day of your life - allowing Him to have sway, allowing him to direct every action you take, allowing him to determine decisions on every matter you face, allowing him to have the first portion of your income for his use rather than your own or your family's, allowing Him to come in and out of your life at **His** pleasure. If there are influences or preferences or priorities that come before Jesus then you have not received him fully.

So how do we receive him afresh? Well recommit your life to him this day. Make him Lord over everything in your life – not just the bits your happy to give him. Recognise today again that the Sovereign Lord Jesus came into this World for you. Next pray that you will obey God's will in your life this year. That might mean accepting that some decisions that you have made in 2020 have been driven more by your own thinking than God's direction, and so come to him seeking his forgiveness for those areas of your life where he is not Lord and asking his Holy Spirit to redirect you to his

will, and to invest more into him than anything else in your life this year.

Will you receive him? Are you willing to give him your all this year? Don't just listen to this and walk away from the message. Do something about it. Scripture makes it very clear what happens to humanity for those that reject Jesus. But the promise that John provides for all of us that receive him are these incredible words from our reading this morning. "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God".

As we move out of this Christmas Season, the words of the Carol In the Bleak Mid Winter prompt us to consider what we are willing to give Jesus, 'What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; If I were a wise man, I would do my part. Yet what I can I give him – give my heart". Give him your heart this year and onwards.