

Why in the World?  
To Communicate and Demonstrate  
Title Slide

Good morning! It's good to be in the house of the Lord together on this first Sunday in Advent, which marks the first Sunday of the Christian year of worship.

As you already know, in our culture, it's really easy to move directly from Thanksgiving right into Christmas, isn't it? Okay, let's be real, in our culture it's easy to move from Labor Day right into Christmas, or at a bare minimum from Halloween into Christmas, right?!

Now, if you are one of those people who likes to begin your Christmas celebrations early, then you will find it good news that I'm not here today to tell you when you should start listening to Christmas music on the radio, or when you should start putting your Christmas tree up. You can even go ahead and breathe a little sigh of relief now if you want to...

But I am here to tell you, that isn't really even good news at all! What is really good news is the gift God has given to the church in the gift of Advent. For you see, Advent is not a time to help us get ready for Christmas—Advent is a time set aside to help us get ready for Christ!

Advent covers the four week period, marked off by Sundays, leading up to Christmas. It is both a time to give thanks for the gift of Christ to us in times past, and a time to anticipate the Second Coming of Christ at the end of all time as we know it.

Thus we can sing in our opening hymn, “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus,” these words: *Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King. Born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring. By thine own eternal spirit rule in all our hearts alone; by thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.*

In Advent it is appropriate to sing about baby Jesus being born in a manger, and about King Jesus establishing his kingdom on earth.

This year, during the four Sundays in Advent, we’re going to be presenting a sermon series called, *Why in the World?* Together, we’ll be looking at the reason God became one of us.

Christians believe all kinds of things that some other people may consider crazy. One of the unique things Christians believe is that on Christmas morning, God became one of us in Jesus. For thirty years he lived under cover as a carpenter, surfaced as a miracle worker and rabbi for three years, and allowed himself to die in the most degrading way imaginable, by being crucified on a cross.

He came as one of us, but was treated as less than one of us. Why in the world would God do that? We think we know why he died, to save us from our sins, but what compelled him to live as one of us?

In this Advent series, we’ll explore four reasons why Jesus was born.

1. He came into the world to communicate and demonstrate what God is like.
2. He came into the world to model God’s mercy and grace.
3. He came into the world to elevate the status of everyone.

4. He came into the world to show what is most important to God.

In our time this morning, we're going to explore the first of these four reasons why Jesus was born: that he came into the world to communicate and demonstrate what God is like.

Our primary scripture lesson from this past week's Bible reading plan, and for this morning's sermon, comes to us from John's gospel, chapter 14:1-14. Hear these words from Jesus himself...

Slides 2,3 & 4 (in succession)

*<sup>1</sup>“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup>You know the way to the place where I am going.”*

*<sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”*

*<sup>6</sup>Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*

*<sup>8</sup>Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”*

*<sup>9</sup>Jesus answered: “Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?*

*<sup>10</sup> Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. <sup>11</sup> Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. <sup>12</sup> Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup> And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup> You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*

Like any father, our heavenly Father wants to be known. What earthly father wants to stay distant and aloof from his children? Certainly not any father that we'd want as our father, or one we would want to emulate as we father our own children.

Yet God is much more than an earthly father. God can be very mysterious. God can be difficult to figure out. He's not a white-bearded old man sitting up in heaven. He isn't a human being at all.

But, Jesus told his disciples that if they really knew him, they would also know God. All they had to do was to look at Jesus, listen to the words he said, and watch the things he did, and they would see and hear God in action!

But Jesus also knew something else about our human nature: he knew that we are inclined to try to figure out God by looking in all the wrong places.

We try to figure out God by looking at our circumstances. We constantly try to piece together events to identify God's activity in our lives. The problem is, we're terrible at interpreting our circumstances. We experience something bad that happens in our life, and think God is out to get us. We experience something good in life and we think it's because we're so good and wonderful!

We see God where we want to see him, and we ignore him in other circumstances when the interpretation doesn't fit with who we want God to be in our lives. Or we assume we know what God is up to, and then our world gets rocked when our circumstances suddenly change.

Sometimes we look to our own religious traditions to try and figure out who God is. If you were raised in a church, you have some beliefs and some thoughts about God that were ingrained in you as a child. Based on your religious tradition, you have built-in assumptions about what God values, which sins most displease him, and which ones he doesn't really get all that worked up about. Usually, God is more lenient with us than he is with people outside our own group.

Now religious traditions are important. They have their place. They just shouldn't be *first* place! We know that people always mattered more to Jesus than did the religious traditions and practices of his day. In fact, we'll explore that topic for a whole week, in week four of this series, so enough of that for now.

We also try to figure out God by looking within ourselves. The problem with looking within is that it will only get you so far. Think about it, what is within ourselves is really limited to what is already within ourselves, isn't it? And that's pretty limiting! God is so much bigger than whatever is within us. And the sixteen-year-old version of within, is different than the thirty-year-old version of within, and that's different still than the fifty-five-year-old version of within. So, which one is God?

Finally, we sometimes try to find God in the wrong place by looking to nature. Now, nature is great! Nature can teach us some things about God on a large, overarching scale. Like the vastness of the universe can teach us something about the vastness of God. Or the tiny details of a hummingbird can teach us that God cares for the details in our lives too.

But the problem with trying to find God in nature, is like the problem we have of seeing nature only from thirty thousand feet up. Nature is beautiful flying over it in an airplane. But up close and personal, nature can kill you! There's no grace in nature. There's no forgiveness in nature. There's no mercy in nature. Nature is survival of the fittest, and that isn't exactly God, now is it?

The good news is, we don't have to look to our circumstances, religious traditions, within, or to nature to find out what God is like. God wants us to know him. He became one of us to communicate and demonstrate what he is like. That's powerful! It means if you move past Jesus, you're moving away from God. And if you stop short of Jesus, you stop short of the insights about God that would help you in your life, and further your understanding of what God wants for you.

Yes, God can be mysterious, and he can be difficult to figure out. That's because God is not human.

Isaiah 55:8-9 says, **slide 5**

<sup>8</sup> *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,”  
declares the Lord.*

<sup>9</sup> *“As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

But God did become a human being in Jesus—he became one of us—so we could know God. Jesus is saying, “I am as close as you will see in this life to seeing what God the Father is like.”

Jesus didn’t claim to have the best explanation of God; he claimed to be the best explanation of God. We need to understand who Jesus is, to understand who God is.

Remember Jesus’ words to Thomas in John 14, *“No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*

In our reading from Matthew 11 this past week, Jesus put it slightly differently. In verse 27 he says, *“All things have been committed to me by my Father. 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.”*

The close, intimate communion between God the Father and God the Son is the core of their relationship. For anyone else to know God, God must reveal himself to that person, by the Son’s choice. But how fortunate we are that Jesus has clearly revealed God to us, and that Jesus is the way we can come to know God.

Of course the best way we can learn how Jesus came to demonstrate and communicate what God is like, is to read all we can about Jesus straight from God's word. Since Jesus is the word made flesh who came and dwelled right here among us, there's no better way for us to get to know God.

This past week, as I was doing some of my reading from the Bible reading plan, I picked up a copy of the Bible that I have that has all the words of Jesus written in red. It struck me that if Jesus came to communicate what God is like, then he would do that through words. And if I can read from a copy of a bible that has all of his words written in red, then I had better really pay attention to those words in particular!

One of the passages we focused on this past week was Matthew 5:43-48. Now in Matthew's gospel, chapters 5, 6, & 7 are all the Sermon on the Mount. Except for the opening sentence of chapter 5, and the closing sentence of chapter 7 which are narration, all the other words are in red! Jesus does a whole lot of communicating! Jesus teaches and teaches. He preaches and preaches. He speaks, and talks, and communicates a whole lot about God, and how people who are following after God ought to live their lives.

Matthew 5 begins with the Beatitudes. They are familiar words about what it means to be blessed in the kingdom Jesus ushers in.

<sup>3</sup> *"Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>4</sup> *Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.*

<sup>5</sup> *Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.*

<sup>6</sup> *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,*



*for they will be filled.*  
<sup>7</sup> *Blessed are the merciful,*  
*for they will be shown mercy.*  
<sup>8</sup> *Blessed are the pure in heart,*  
*for they will see God.*  
<sup>9</sup> *Blessed are the peacemakers,*  
*for they will be called children of God.*  
<sup>10</sup> *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of*  
*righteousness,*  
*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Following the headings in my bible, Jesus goes on to teach about salt & light, the Law, anger, lust, divorce, making vows, retaliation, and then he teaches about loving one's enemies.

In Matthew 5:43-45 Jesus says, <sup>43</sup> *You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'* <sup>44</sup> *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,* <sup>45</sup> *that you may be children of your Father in heaven."*

God loves everyone! He created everyone, and desires that everyone should come into a saving relationship with him through Jesus. When we love our enemies and pray for people who persecute us, we follow in the footsteps of God. We also follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, who even on the cross prayed for his enemies who were crucifying him, and asked the Father to forgive them for what they were doing. Even when we were enemies of God and were separated from him by our sin, God still loved us. In fact, God loves us so much, and wanted us to know him so much, he didn't send a message, he came here himself to show us. People will hurt us, and we will have enemies. But when we love and pray for our enemies, we overcome evil with good, just like God overcame our evil with the goodness and forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

Now, in addition to Jesus coming into the world to communicate what God is like, he also came into the world to demonstrate what God is like.

Right after Jesus finished the Sermon on the Mount, he encountered a man with leprosy. We read this story in Matthew 8:1-4 this past week. The man with leprosy knelt before Jesus, and said, "Lord if you are willing, you can make me clean."

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man, and said, "I am willing, be clean!"

Now leprosy was a contagious skin disease that had no known cure. If a person contracted leprosy, they were banished to live away from everyone else in society and spend their days in a leper colony until they died. No one wanted to touch a leper for fear of contracting the dreaded disease. So it was not only a big deal that Jesus reached out his hand and touched the leper, but also that he was willing to do so.

If you ever find it hard to believe that God cares about you as a person, or that God even knows, let alone cares about whatever it is that you're going through, I want you to remember this story. Jesus knows what the man with leprosy is going through. He is willing to meet the man at the point of his greatest need, reaches out, touches him, and makes him well.

As Christians, we know that our greatest need is to overcome the sin that we have that separates us from God. Only Christ's atoning death on the cross can take away our sin and restore us to a right relationship with God through faith in Christ. Like the leper, all we have to do is ask Christ to heal us! He has already demonstrated just how willing he is! He has shown the length to which we would go to save us.

Not only was Jesus willing to die to save us, but in this series we're learning just how willing Jesus was to live right here on earth among us, to demonstrate how great the Father's love is for each and every one of us.

This Advent season, get to know what God is like, by reading about the Son—Jesus—in God's Holy Word.