

St Michael's Cornhill

THE CITY
NEW YEAR SERVICE

09 / 01 / 2026

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Transcript of sermon delivered by Akeel Sashak

Readings: John 1:1-13. Colossians 1:15-23

Hope for the City

May I start by thanking St Michael's Cornhill for the honour of being able to address you today at this service to herald the beginning of a New Year in the City. On behalf of all of us with the privilege of working in this great City, may I also thank the Lady Mayor and the Governor of the Bank England for gracing us with their presence.

My context

I will start by providing you with a bit of personal context. I was born into a Muslim family but never gave much thought to the existence of God even if I would not have gone quite as far as denying his existence. My life seemed to me to be pretty good without God's help so why would I pay too much attention to him. If he was indeed there, I felt pretty sure that I was good enough for him anyway.

Cognitive dissonance

It may sound incoherent, but this is the cognitive dissonance under which most people in the City conduct their lives. Over the last 40 years as a banker, I've been surrounded by the most extraordinarily curious people who are curious about everything save for the most important question of life, about which most are breathtakingly incurious. Maybe this is changing now. I'm sure we've all read reports of a so-called Quiet Revival, and the surge in interest about God amongst young men in their twenties.

Dismissing Jesus

My lack of curiosity about God extended to Jesus and was informed by being born into a religion that told me Jesus had been superseded and surpassed by Mohammed. Moreover, the little consideration I had given to the life of Jesus left me with the picture of a seemingly good man for whom things had not ended well.

Life changing passage

It was against this backdrop, that the First Lesson read by our Lady Mayor, changed everything for me when I was 21 - indeed it is this passage of Scripture, more than any other, that captures why faith in Jesus has brought meaning and purpose to my life and has proved to be transformative to the way I live out every aspect of my life including in the City

There at the beginning

v1 tells us that *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*”. This word was a person: **he** who was with God in the beginning. I wonder how many of us have really considered that Jesus was there from the beginning, the very agent that brought our world into existence - not just the human Jesus whose first appearing we've been celebrating over recent weeks. “...*without him nothing was made that has been made*”. So when we read in Genesis of God creating the heavens and the earth, this was the handiwork of Jesus. It makes it impossible therefore to identify Jesus as anything other than God in the fullest sense. Paul hammers the point home eloquently in our second reading as the one *before all things, and by him all*

things consist As Jesus himself says later on in John's gospel, *I and the Father are one*. Especially from my Muslim background, this was a shocking discovery.

Need to hear him out

If God truly became flesh in the person of Jesus, we owe it to ourselves to hear what he had to say to us. Men and women across this City persist in believing speculations about God and have never considered the possibility that he has actually revealed himself to us directly, despite the bible being the most read book on earth, so we don't need to speculate about him and his purposes. Time doesn't allow us today to explore the many wonderful revelations about God in the entirety of John's prologue. But it's not just the revelation of God John provides, it also demands a response.

Light shines in the darkness

In our final few moments, notice the radial claim in v5. "*The light shineth in the darkness*". This light which shines in the darkness is the visible witness of God in his creation. The fingerprints of God are everywhere to see so we have no excuse if we choose to ignore him. This light, "*the darkness comprehended it not*". This is elaborated further in v 10 which says "*He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not*" telling us that rejection of the truth about Jesus is the default response of a dark world.

None of us need persuading that our world is very dark. Yet the encouragement here is that the darkness has not overcome God's plan for humanity. I often hear people say that even if there was a good God, the darkness seems to have triumphed. Across our

world today, it's interesting that the places where the Church is growing fastest, in countries like Iran and China, are those very same place where efforts of men to put out the light of Jesus are most extreme.

Sons of God

In v12-13 John tells us that those who receive the light, gain the right to become children of God; irrespective of the religious background they are born into. Only God knows how 2026 will turn out for our great City, but we do know from this passage that many in the City will continue to reject God. But we also know that God's light will continue to shine in the City and he will continue to gather those that believe in Jesus to himself for eternity so, don't take any comfort from those around you that are rejecting the light of Jesus.

Look deeper

Perhaps we should all learn from the younger generation, and their growing willingness to consider the claims of Christ. If anything in what you have heard just now has led you to consider Jesus in a new light, then please pick up John's eyewitness account and read it in its entirety for yourselves and see where that leads you to on the question of who Jesus is and how you should respond to him. Maybe you will discover, as I did 40 years ago, that you no longer need to speculate about who God is because he has revealed himself fully to you and that demands a response

We pride ourselves at St Michael's on giving people the space to consider the Christian faith afresh. Click [here](#) if you would like to hear more about a guided read-through of one of the eye-witness accounts of the life of Jesus.