

Readers might remember Mr and Mrs Beaver reacting to the lamentable ignorance of the Pevensie children, who don't seem to know anything about the great king, the mighty Aslan.

It's a familiar scene for those who have journeyed in the land of Narnia, the creation of children's author CS Lewis.

And that might be all you know of the man at the centre of today's episode.

This is not surprising considering just how popular 'The Chronicles of Narnia' have been.

CS Lewis wrote seven books in which children are magically transported to the land of Narnia, where the Lion Aslan frequently calls upon them to protect his creation from a wide range of evils.

Since their publication between 1950 and 1956, the Chronicles of Narnia have sold more than 100 million copies in 47 languages.

Despite their dated references and sometimes controversial worldviews, [the *Post-Gazette* reports] they continue to sell over a million copies a year.

They've also inspired theatre performances, radio plays, television series, and three major films that earned a healthy one and a half billion US dollars.

So it's understandable that many people know of Lewis only as a very successful children's author, unaware that he is also the author of a huge collection of books commending and defending the Christian faith, *Mere Christianity*, *Miracles*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and so on.

His individual essays on religion and philosophy have been printed and reprinted in a host of published collections, including my favourite collection, now out of print but sits happily on my bookshelf—or will when my stupid library reaches me by boat here in Wheaton College. The collection is called '*Undeceptions*'. And it's the inspiration behind the name of our show.

Even less well-known is that Lewis was a revered scholar of medieval and renaissance English. And his lectures on the theme were wildly popular (for nerdy university lectures), with auditoriums packed to the rafters when he delivered them.

Narnia is wonderful. But it's a pity people don't know more about the man, his career, and his famous town—all of which form the backdrop for the incredible fantasy world he created for millions of readers.

Narnia was born in Oxford, where most of his life was lived.

He fell in love with this medieval university town in his early twenties. He once wrote of it;

*A clean, sweet city lulled by ancient streams,
A place of visions and of loosening chains,
A refuge of the elect, a tower of dreams.*

For Lewis, Oxford was five parts intellect and rationality, and five parts mystery and imagination. It's exactly what an educational environment should be.

He told one of his students that if you could lift Oxford and place it in his native County Down in Northern Ireland, you would have 'heaven'!

So, that's where we're going today—not heaven exactly, nor County Down, but Lewis' Oxford.

Who was C.S. Lewis?

Clive Staples Lewis - Jack to family and friends - was born in Belfast in Ireland on 29 November, 1898.

His father, Albert Lewis, was a solicitor, and his mother Florence a clergyman's daughter.

His older brother, Warren Hamilton Lewis, was known to Jack as 'Warnie'.

Together, Jack and Warnie would create imaginary worlds to pass the time, including Boxen, a fantasy land run by talking animals.

He also spent hours roaming his family home, 'Little Lea', exploring still more worlds presented by his father and mother's huge collection of books.

Language (multiple languages) and books became Lewis' solace through difficult years at boarding school, and through the dark years of WWI (where he was injured on the front line). And, of course, languages and books became his world when he settled for his studies at Oxford and Magdalen College, where he was appointed Tutorial Fellow in English.

Simon Horobin:

So we're just outside the oldest bit of the college. We just come through the main gate and that sort of gate house, the great tower, the chapel, the Cloisters is the original part of the medieval college that goes back to the mid-15th century. And then obviously there are various extensions to it, the sort of 19th century, Neo-Gothic quads over to the left there.

John Dickson:

I'm in the company of Professor Simon Horobin - a Professor of English Language & Literature at Oxford University, and a Tutorial Fellow at Magdalen College. Yes, he holds C S Lewis' exact post—about a century after him!

Simon has written a ton of things, mainly nerdy scholarly articles about English, as well as books like *How English Became English: A Short History of a Global Language*, *Chaucer's Language*, and *Does Spelling Matter?*

And for the general public he literally 'wrote the book' on the English language, titled simply *The English Language*, in the wonderful *Oxford Very Short Introduction* series published by Oxford University Press.

It's not really his day job but he offered to give me a guided tour of Lewis' Oxford. We're currently standing in front of the building that marked a momentous change in Lewis' life...

Simon Horobin:

The building we've got directly in front of us, there is actually the president's lodgings. That's where the president of the college lives. It's quite a significant, very nice place for

Lewis as well, actually, because it's where he came from. When he first was appointed a fellow at the college that's back in 1925 the ceremony that they used at the time, which they still used today actually is where you sort of assemble in the lodgings with all of the fellows of the college lined up alongside you kneel.

The president says some stuff in Latin and you pledge to hold the statutes and so on. Then you go round each of the fellows of the college and shake hands. Each fellow says, "I wish you joy", to which you make no reply, which as Lewis says, after the 25th time, it starts to sound a bit strange.

But I think what's really intriguing about that is the word "joy", because it becomes so significant for this in the rest of his life. You know, the idea of joy is this sort of longing the spiritual yearning that he feels. And of course, there's Joy Davidman. She became his wife later on. So, you know, (saying) "I wish you joy" back in 1935 (had) a slightly more classical tradition.

John Dickson:

Surprised by Joy is actually the title of Lewis' autobiography (well, it's sort of an autobiography).

For Lewis joy is not happiness, but a yearning for something beyond ourselves that disappears even as we grasp it - "... an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction", he writes.

"It might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief. But then it is a kind we want. I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world."

His whole life was a search for joy. But he came close to never experiencing it.

Lewis had made it to Oxford on a scholarship but the outbreak of World War One upended his plans for a higher education.

He volunteered for the Oxford University Officers' Training Corps.

Simon Horobin:

And so we're standing outside Keble College, which is where Lewis came in 1917 to do his training for going into the first World War. He spent a lot of time learning how to march and doing all the kind of basics of army training.

He didn't find his rooms very comfortable. He longed for his own college. At first, he was allowed not the prettiest of all colleges. I think, it was quite Spartan, especially at that time. So they allowed him to go back at weekends and then they stopped that and he had to just live here full time. Because of the chance and randomness of the alphabet, he found himself sharing a room with a man called Patrick Moore. They then ended up going into the Somerset Light Infantry together, although they weren't posted to the same place. They became very good friends. When they went off into battle, they made a kind of agreement that if one of them should be killed, the other one would look after the surviving parent of the other.

Patty Moore was killed. And so Lewis stuck with that agreement. When he came back to Oxford, he looked after (Patty's) mother, Mrs Moore and her daughter, Maureen. It was a pretty complicated arrangement because as an undergraduate, you were supposed to live in college. So at the same time, he was trying to live off quite a meagre scholarly allowance, and he was also responsible for Mrs. Moore and her daughter. Then they came when they bought his house up in Heddington in 1930, they went in together in buying the house and she lived with them right up until the 1950s until she died. So really that just chance encounter was quite important

JD: *Some people have said there was something untoward about Lewis and Mrs. Moore. And I mean, is there any indication of that? Was he just being a good loyal friend?*

SH: It's really hard to know. There isn't any real evidence. He kept a diary at the time (but) there's nothing in there that really helps to answer that question either way really. It has been suggested by a number of biographers that it was a romantic relationship (but) I think it's, it's very difficult to know ... none of their correspondence between them survived. He referred to "Mr. Morris" mother quite often. But again, you know, that might just be sort of a way of trying to explain what was obviously otherwise a slightly complicated relationship to outsiders.

His own parents were both dead by then ... his mother died when he was very young and that was a really sort of cataclysmic event in his childhood. That alone would explain his attachment to her. He writes about that very movingly at the beginning of

Surprised By Joy, you know, he says “everything that gave me stability at that point was shattered”. He says it's all islands. The great Atlantis had sunk, it was a really important event for him. And of course, you know, it's one that he revisited again in later life in *The Magician's Nephew* where Dery has a mother who's dying and much of the book is spent with him trying to find a way of saving her. And of course at the end when he gets the apple and Aslan says “you can take it back and give it to your mother”, and he does, she recovers. For Lewis, that's really very poignant, an undoing of that terrible moment of his childhood. So I think that was a shattering moment for him as a child.

He had a very difficult relationship with his father who lived up until 1930. I think that was also influential in his relationship with Mrs. Moore, because when he was just about to go off to France he wrote to his father and said “I'm gonna have to leave ... it's come much sooner than we thought can you come and say goodbye to me”, and his father hesitated and didn't, and the moment passed and Mrs. Moore was there, but his father wasn't. I think he felt very left at that moment. Of course, at the moment his mother died his father decided to send him and his brother off to boarding school in England. I think, again, that those moments had a very negative effect on his relationship with his father. So in some senses, I think that is all part of, you know, that, that sort of looking for a mother figure.

John Dickson:

Lewis arrived in France with the first battalion of the Somerset Light infantry where he spent part of 1917 and 1918, before being wounded by a German shell and evacuated to England.

He rarely spoke about the horrors of World War One. It was a conscious choice. The war might have had his body but it could not have his mind.

He wrote, “I put the war on one side to a degree which some people will think shameful and some incredible. Others will call it a flight from reality. I maintain that it was rather a treaty with reality, the fixing of a frontier”.

So, Lewis was finally free to pursue his beloved Oxford.

Only there was one more barrier to face - maybe he wasn't smart enough.

Simon Horobin:

When (Lewis) came up in 1917, you had to sit, even though he'd got a scholarship, you had to sit what's called responses, which was three examinations including one in Latin and one in Greek. This is all the students, no matter what subject you're doing.

Of course he was fine with the Latin and the Greek, but he was terrible at maths, and in fact he failed responses and then spent that summer term while he was also training for the army getting some math tuition to try and basically mug up his maths. He then went into the army and served, and came back as I said in 1919. And luckily for Lewis, the university decided that anyone who had served in the war was to be excused responses. So he never actually had to sit the maths again because one wonders whether he would've ever passed it.

John Dickson:

Lewis certainly rewarded Oxford's faith in him.

He went on to receive a First in what's called Honour Moderations (Greek and Latin language) in 1920, and then a First in Greats (Philosophy and Ancient History) in 1922.

Then, to improve his chances of obtaining an academic position, he completed a two-year degree in English ... in one year - receiving another first.

Lewis earned a triple-first at Oxford - a rare achievement - and was elected a Fellow and Tutor in English Literature at Magdalen College.

He held the position for almost 30 years ... but it's not one he appreciated straight away.

JD: *I was gonna ask you if you felt he really always wanted to be a classicist, not, you know, an English tutor. It sounds like he got an English tutor job because there wasn't a classics job ... am I right?*

SH: Actually the first jobs he applied for were philosophy jobs and in fact, he applied for a research post in Philosophy in 1922 but he had to do a whole load of classical exam papers as part of it. But he didn't get it. He then applied for a tutorial fellowship at Trinity College in philosophy. He was interviewed for it but he didn't get it either, and it went to the same person who got the philosophy job. So he became this kind of nemesis. So that was actually his original career trajectory.

I think it was really interesting to wonder because if he got that job at Trinity, he would've been a professional philosopher. Looking back on it, I think he was quite happy that he

didn't go down that route because he felt that there was something about that introspection that comes with being a philosopher. He thought might not be good for him sort of long term. I'd say really that English was his hobby for much of his early academic life. He was a bit sniffy about the English school when he started it, because it was slightly looked down upon at the time.

And the literature was all in English, you know, where there's something rigorous about having to learn ancient Greek.

John Dickson:

There is, of course, lots of rigour in Simon's area of medieval English literature. And, as I mentioned earlier, he holds Lewis' very post.

JD: *Am I right? That you essentially hold the same chair.*

SH: It's kind of terrifying in lots of ways, because of course, one doesn't really want to be compared with Lewis cause you know, it's just so incredibly learned. But it's yeah, it's inspiring, definitely, because you know, he, he did so much with it made such an amazing contribution as a scholar, as a tutor as well. One can learn a lot from Lewis. I think, you know, one can learn a lot from Lewis as a lecturer, people went to Lewis's lectures, you know, they were popular and, you know, people write about Lewis's tutorials in a way that, you know, shows that they, they found them, you know, incredibly helpful encouraging, stimulating. So, you know, it's, it's inspiring, but you know, a little intimidating and of course, Lewis in those days, English was a new subject in the 1920s. He was the first English tutor at Magdalen.

JD: *Now, I, given that, is your specialty, I have a question we are always raising on interceptions. People say that the medieval period was the dark ages from a literary point of view. Surely not?*

SH: No, exactly. I mean, Lewis would, would be outraged by that. I mean, he was obviously aware of that, but you know, he felt there was so much that we could learn from the middle ages, and that they were so much more informed than we give them credit for. But also, you know, there was that even where they were wrong, they were wrong in very interesting ways, you know, his understanding of the medieval cosmos, which, you know, has been proved to be wrong.

JD: *You gotta think 200 years from now, what will they be saying about some of our, firm theories about the universe?*

SH: Yeah. He was very, against presentism, you know, the idea that we, we are much more learning because that's just where we happened to be.

So we are standing in front of the, what's called the new building - but that's obviously a classic Oxford use of the word new because it actually goes back to 1720 and this is where, when he came, he was given rooms in this building, a set is what's called a set of three rooms, which he lived in. It's the two windows just to the right of the beautiful red flowers you can see in the window boxes. He had, a sitting room at the back, which overlooks the deer park. And he said in a letter to his father, you know, that his rooms were beautiful beyond expectation. It feels like you're in the middle of the countryside.

And it's in those, in those rooms that there's that moment in *Surprised By Joy*, where he describes his conversion to theism, as he says, "you must picture me in those rooms in Maudlin night after night, resisting the approach of him who I, so earnestly desire not to meet".

The sort of that's that famous line about the most dejected and reluctant convert - and he kneels down and prays. That's his conversion to theism, which happened in exactly that spot.

EXCERPT - *Surprised By Joy*

People who are naturally religious find difficulty in understanding the horror of such a revelation. Amiable agnostics will talk cheerfully about 'man's search for God'. To me, as I then was, they might as well have talked about the mouse's search for the cat...

Remember, I had always wanted, above all things, not to be 'interfered with'. I had wanted (mad wish) 'to call my soul my own'. I had been far more anxious to avoid suffering than to achieve delight. I had always aimed at limited liabilities...

But now what had been an ideal became a command; and what might not be expected of one? Doubtless, by definition, God was Reason itself. But would He also be 'reasonable' in that other, more comfortable, sense? Not the slightest assurance on that score was offered me. Total surrender, the absolute leap in the dark, was demanded. The reality with which no treaty can be made was upon me. The demand was not even 'All or nothing'. I think that stage had passed, on the bus top when I unbuckled my armour and the snowman started to melt. Now, the demand was simply 'All'. You must picture me alone in that room at Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had, at last, come upon

me. In the Trinity Term of 1929, I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility that will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape?

The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation.

C.S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy, 1955

John Dickson

Lewis had come only to the point of knowing there was an Almighty God who demanded submission.

His journey to Christianity had a few hurdles to jump. Part of that journey involved strolling through the deer park at the back of Magdalen College with some other important scholars.

Simon Horobin

So this is called Addison's walk named after, uh, the 18th-century essayist Joseph Addison, who was a fellow here and Lewis loved it and he would come here, uh, every morning before he went to chapel, he would come and do the loop, this kind of circular walk around this big water meadow. It was here walking down. Addison's walk - 'Adders' as he always called it - that he was walking one night after dinner in the hall with Hugo Dyson and J.R.R. Tolkien ... 'Tollers' as he called him.

John Dickson:

Hugo Dyson was a close friend of JRR Tolkien's. They met at the University of Reading where Dyson was teaching English. Dyson was an expert on Shakespeare and a few years later he got a fellowship with Oxford's Merton College.

J.R.R. Tolkien, as many of our listeners will know, is best known for his writing of the fantasy epic, *The Lord of the Rings*. Academically, though, he was a giant in the realms of philology - the study of the structure, the historical development of, and relationships

between languages. Tolkien was the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon and a Fellow of Oxford's Pembroke College.

Lewis, Dyson and Tolkien would become three of the founding members of that famous Oxford literary society, The Inklings - more on that later.

For now, just imagine three impressive minds going for a late-night stroll.

Simon Horobin:

So yeah, Tolkien and Dyson were walking down, Allison's walk. So this would've sort of been about 10 o'clock at night. What was important about that walk was the subject of, it was about the notion of Christianity and mythology which was kind of central to Lewis's objections to Christianity. He understood, he converted to theism by now, but he sought Christianity as just another one of the myths.

He had a very sound understanding of classical mythology, of course, from his undergraduate degree. He also loved Norse mythology and Celtic mythology. In fact, he said of all of them, Norse was the one that attracted him most and he could see all the similarities in them. So he understood them all to be pointing towards something, but why privilege Christianity? And it was this conversation particularly when Tolkien opened up to him, the idea that Christianity could be the true myth and that others are simply pointing towards it. There are sort of glimpses of the reality in those but Christianity has a claim to be what he called a "true myth". That seemed to really then help Lewis to get over that final step.

John Dickson:

It's a fascinating idea. Instead of outright denying and denouncing Pagan myths, Tolkien helped Lewis see that these myths themselves can be thought of as pointers to ultimate reality, A reality that finds a concrete historical centre point in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

But Tolkien was by no means to think of things this way. This was a very common theme in the Christian proclamation of the gospel in the first few centuries of the church. People like Justin martyr in the early 2nd century, Athenagoras in the late second century, as well as great third-century Christian intellectuals like Tertullian, Minucius Felix, and Lactantius ALL used the best of pagan philosophy and story to show that Christianity was not merely the negation of human wisdom but its fulfilment, indeed, the fulfilment of all humanity's deepest desires.

They all felt at ease doing this because there is a classic example of the apostle Paul doing it in the New Testament. When he preached in Athens in the Areopagus—a kind of High Court of ideas—Paul didn't just rebuke his Pagan Greek audience for their idol worship; he also said that the altar to an unknown God was a window to the God who could be known; and he even approvingly quoted pagan hymns to the highest God Zeus [one written by Cleanthes, another by Aratus] to make the point that the best of Greek thought had already partially stumbled across the founding principle of Christianity: that God is the source of all creation, not a part of creation, and that we humans are the creator's offspring.

Tolkien, Dyson, and ultimately Lewis, were all echoing a very ancient approach to the public explanation of the Christian faith.

Simon Horobin:

They went back to the new buildings, and walked up and down the quad in front of it for a while. Then he let Tolkien out of a little side gate, back to Merton college at 3:00 AM and went back into his room to talk longer with Dyson. So it was a really very late-night affair, but, he identifies that particular moment in *Surprised By Joy* as being really important for his understanding of those ideas.

JD: *When you compare it to the kind of defensive anti-world conservative Christianity you sometimes get today, that view of Tolkien and then C.S Lewis is so positive Isn't it? So for the world. As in the Greeks had stumbled across truths that were pointers to the great truth. It wasn't anti, I mean, you often find people sort of saying, oh no, no, no, the ancient myths aren't like Christianity they're yeah, totally different. But Lewis was very happy to embrace it.*

SH: Exactly. And I think it comes back to our idea that, that, you know, the dark ages or the idea that we are always progressing beyond something and therefore leaving it behind us and making it appear redundant. You know, Lewis is very open to the idea

that there were these great thinkers of the past who had kind of, you know, access to some truth, which we can benefit from. We've stopped at this particular point here in Addison's walk because there's a, there's a plaque here that has a, this is at the gates of the back of the deer park, which has a poem that Lewis wrote, which actually refers specifically to Addison's walk.

It's called '*What the Bird Said*'

*Early in the year I heard in Addison's Walk, a bird sing clear this year, the summer will
come true this year.*

*This year winds will not strip the blossom from the apple trees this year nor won a rain
destroy.*

*The peas this year times, nature will no more defeat you, nor all the promised moments
in their passing, cheat you this time.*

*They will not lead you round and back to autumn one year over by the well-worn track
this year, this year as all these flowers foretell, we shall escape the circle
and undo the spell often deceived yet open once again, your heart quick, quick, quick,
the gates are drawn apart.*

John Dickson:

The gates had certainly opened for Lewis.

The great mythologist, the lover of Greek legends and Norse sagas, had finally found what he believed they were all pointing to.

His life's journey had reached a mountaintop, but his exploration of Oxford was only just beginning.

JD: *And so as an English scholar, um, what was he like? I mean, everyone knows you know, they either know his fiction books or they know his Christian apologetics, but actually, his day job was neither.*

SH: It's intriguing really because yeah. He spent much of his life reading student essays on medieval and Renaissance literature and in the evening writing his books yeah. On that subject. He made a, an amazing contribution really partly because of his immense wide reading of the original sources. So he didn't have a lot of time for criticism, other people's writings. He just went back to the original sources.

John Dickson:

Lewis's first big work on medieval literature was a book called *Allegory of Love*, a book about medieval love - poetry, really - and the widespread use of the allegorical form.

EXCERPT - ALLEGORY OF LOVE

"Humanity does not pass through phases as a train passes through stations: being alive, it has the privilege of always moving yet never leaving anything behind. Whatever we

have been, in some sort we still are. Neither the form nor the sentiment of this old poetry has passed away without leaving indelible traces on our minds.”

— C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*

Simon Horobin:

He wrote about some of the central texts of medieval allegorical writing. So the *Romance of the Rose*, which is a medieval French work, it's all about, um, a lover trying to approach a rose and getting rebuffed by various different figures that he has to kind of negotiate on the way. Lewis was sort of fascinated by that and by its legacy.

JD: *So it kind of intellectual history as well as yeah. Sort of literary criticism.*

SH: Exactly. Yeah. Cuz I mean it was, that was so influential for the whole of the middle ages really.

John Dickson:

One of the other really important academic contributions that Lewis made was a his work on 16th-century English literature called *The Oxford History of English Literature*. In it, Lewis continued to express his big idea that we heard earlier from Simon - that this idea that there was a break (a 'dark age') between the medieval period to the renaissance has been massively overplayed. Lewis was just hugely sceptical of that.

Simon Horobin

He actually gave lectures on the idea that you know, the Renaissance never actually happened. And in fact, we're now walking past the examination school which is where he would've given his lecture. So another very popular lecture course he gave at the time, um, was called again, he's not big on titles Lewis. People used to turn up in droves to it. You know, people who were there have described it, they were really popular because he was a very engaging lecturer.

JD: *This is before he was famous for the things he became famous for. So, what did he have as a lecturer? I've heard those tapes, the BBC tapes or, you know, you know, just a few minutes, and I thought, well, I'd fall asleep!*

John Dickson:

The BBC tapes we're talking about here are a series of 15-minute live broadcasts that Lewis was invited to give for the BBC from 1941 to 1944, during World War II. The BBC had a monopoly on broadcasting during the war and religious programming that was

broad enough to appeal to the troops was in high demand. Lewis fit the bill. His talks formed the backbone of his extremely popular book, *Mere Christianity*.

Simon Horobin:

I think you're absolutely right. They're different because in those radio broadcasts, he was told that he could only speak for a certain amount of time. They had to be read in advance to be checked by the BBC. So the content was okay, check the timing was right. And then he was required to read them and he couldn't change them in any way. So that didn't really play to his strengths as what was when he gave his lectures. He always made a point of not reading from the script. He had notes and he had another little booklet, which was called "thickening", which was all the extra bits that he might add in if he felt like it. And he spoke really quite spontaneously. And they were funny, there were lots of jokes in them.

People tried not to laugh too much because they wanted to make sure they didn't miss the next bit.

He also spent a lot of time as part of what was called the Socratic club - it was a kind of debating society - that he was involved in here in Oxford. I think he, again, was known to be a great performer in that.

John Dickson:

Just in case you don't know, The Socratic Club was something like a debating society established in 1942 by the Oxford Pastorate, a group of Christian evangelicals who wanted to provide Oxford students with a more lively and engaging version of the Christian faith.

Interestingly, the majority of Socratic Club members were women, drawn from Oxford's all-women colleges.

Lewis was invited to be the club's senior member - a don who would take responsibility for the organisation.

The way it worked was two participants would be invited to present contrasting opinions on a topic. Lewis spoke a few times a year and always drew a big crowd.

On one such occasion he debated Oxford philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe about one aspect of his approach to Miracles - outlined in his book by the same name.

Lewis admitted that Anscombe exposed a problem with one of his proofs—not his conclusion, with which she agreed, but one of his arguments about naturalism, about how much we can know about the world if there is nothing but nature. We've got more for you on that in an upcoming episode.

Now, back to the streets of Oxford...

JD: *So were there ever, Q&A's at these lectures or was that not really in vogue in those days?*

SH: Apparently he was renowned for walking in right on the time that it was supposed to start the immediately starting to lecture. And then he would finish his lecture and be walking out of the room just as he finished. So I don't think there was ever time - I dunno if that was strategic, whether he just was always a bit late for something.

John Dickson:

But Lewis' popular appeal and enduring fame were established by his books.

Titles like *The Problem of Pain*, *Mere Christianity*, *Surprised by Joy*, and *The Screwtape Letters* remain best-sellers.

And, of course, *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

There's a tape of British comedian John Cleese reading CS Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*, the correspondence of a senior devil to his junior on how to best keep human beings away from a real life-changing encounter with God.

Honestly, the Cleese production—while old—is brilliant. Cleese interprets the voice of the demons in a masterful way. Evil is portrayed as intellectual, proud, disdainful, and cold - but not in a cliched 'dastardly' manner. I love it!

Anyway, by 1942 Lewis was an international star thanks to *Screwtape's* success in America.

But the interesting thing is that this 'popular acclaim' soured his reputation among some of his fellow Oxford dons - they felt he'd betrayed his academic birthright. Lewis was, in fact, passed over three times for prestigious university appointments over the next 12 years.

Yet, Oxford remained the centre of Lewis' world.

There are no more than 300 metres between University College, where Lewis first came to study, and Magdalen College, where he first came to teach.

His home - The Kilns - was a short bike ride away near the Oxford suburb of Headington.

Even when Lewis was offered a very prestigious position at Cambridge University later in life, he only agreed to it because it wouldn't require him to move out of Oxford.

He would go down to Cambridge for the term times, but be back to The Kilns for the weekends and holidays. And in Cambridge and Oxford, much of the year are holidays! Oxford University to this day has just three 8-week terms.

This brings Simon and me back to Oxford's High Street and one very significant place on our walking tour ...

Simon Horobin:

So now we're coming past the university church. The reason I'm bringing you past this is that this is where in 1941 Lewis gave his famous sermon, *The Weight of Glory*, one of his university sermons basically.

JD: *I know it well, yeah. "You have never met an ordinary man".*

SH: This is the university church where you - the services are sort of regularly held during the university term time. That's the famous pulpit, which was put up in the 1830s and the first Vicar of the university church to preach from it was John Henry Newman. It must have been quite intimidating ... that's where John Keble preached his sermon, you know, thought have kicked off the Oxford movement.

John Dickson:

The Weight of Glory was preached in Church of St. Mary the Virgin on June 8, 1941, and published later the same year.

In it, CS Lewis touches on the joy that he and every human being instinctive longs for but cannot attain.

Lewis's biographer - and friend of the show - Alister McGrath describes it this way:

"We all long for something, only to find our hopes dashed and frustrated when we actually achieve or attain it. So how is this common human experience to be

interpreted? ... Lewis argues that the Christian faith interprets this longing as a clue to the true goal of human nature. God is the ultimate end of the human soul, the only source of human happiness and joy. Just as physical hunger points to a real human need which can be met through food, so this spiritual hunger corresponds to a real need which can be met through God."

Lewis describes it as a desire far off a country we know but has never visited.

EXCERPT - *The Weight of Glory*

In speaking of this desire for our own far-off country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness. I am almost committing indecency. I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you—the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence; the secret also which pierces with such sweetness that when, in very intimate conversation, the mention of it becomes imminent, we grow awkward and affect to laugh at ourselves; the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name. Our commonest expedient is to call it beauty and behave as if that had settled the matter.

Wordsworth's expedient was to identify it with certain moments in his own past. But all this is a cheat. If Wordsworth had gone back to those moments in the past, he would not have found the thing itself, but only the reminder of it; what he remembered would turn out to be itself a remembering.

The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, or news from a country we have never yet visited.

John Dickson:

One of my favourite passages from this sermon comes at the end, where Lewis speaks of the glory that rests on every human being. Let me read it, but you must picture it

being preached to a packed congregation in the large chapel of the University Church of St Mary.

EXCERPT - *The Weight of Glory*

“The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour’s glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.

This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously—no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner—no mere tolerance or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment. Next to the Blessed

Sacrament itself [he means the bread and wine of communion], your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses.”

Simon Horobin:

I mean, I found it quite intriguing that where it's set, because it was at that time, the university was getting much bigger, lots more undergraduates. And of course, that means this place was really full. so they set the pulpit up like that so that people could all hear it and see the speaker.

JD: *Did he preach regularly in churches around here?*

SH: Not college churches, but he did. He certainly did. He preached also at Holy Trinity in Heddington, which was his local parish church where he is buried. He attended that church regularly once he became a Christian and he certainly preached occasionally there.

John Dickson:

1941 was a huge year for Lewis. He was not only doing all the teaching expected of an Oxford don, but he was also acting as the vice president of Magdalen College, speaking

on the BBC, travelling the country talking to Royal Air Force personnel, and writing still more books.

So it's kind of appropriate that, just outside St Marys (the sight of one of his most famous talks) there's a physical link – sort of – to Lewis' most famous fantasy.

Simon Horobin:

So I've brought you to St. Mary's passage. You've noticed that there's a big crowd of people who have just gone past yeah, exactly where we're heading. This is very much on the tourist trail, and it's the reason that this little doorway here is sometimes suggested as the place where Louis got the idea for a Narnia, for the *Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

JD: *We just saw that family take a photo in front of a lion.*

SH: Yes. So what we've got here is a door that comes out of the university church. Opposite there's this doorway with what looks like a lion, as you said, carved into the wooden door and then around the frame there, these two rather splendid golden fawns with little pan pipes, and then straight ahead of us is a Victorian lamp post. And so the story that they, that everyone that we've just seen would've been told is that one day Lewis came out of this door of the university church blanket of snow - it's the middle of winter - and there is the conjunction of all of the central features of the Narnia story, the lamp-post, Mr. Tumnas (two, Mr. Tumnas's) and carved into the doorway, the face of lion.

JD: *It's a good story.*

SH: It's a lovely story but it's not true, unfortunately. There's a number of reasons why we know that - one is that Lewis actually wrote a whole essay about how the Narnia stories came to him. And in fact, what he tells us is that he started seeing pictures in his imagination in his early teens. And he said that a picture that he first saw was of a fawn in a snowy land, holding a set of parcels and an umbrella and another one of a witch on a sleigh. And it's only much later on in his forties that he decided to see if he could write a story using these images. And he says at that point I was dreaming a lot about lions and at that point, Aslan bounded in. And so one of the things that's amazing about this is all his books tend to go back to much earlier ideas ... often ones that he's tried out in some different form before he's maybe written a poem about something.

And then he starts trying to think about how he might use it later and the idea is still there fully formed, but he somehow sort of, you know, uses it a different way. And it seems to be the case with *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* - it goes right back to

his childhood. So this idea of it suddenly coming to him here when he's in Oxford doesn't really work. Not least because actually that looks like a lion, but it's actually a green man which is quite a sort of common symbol but not a Lion at all.

JD: We've got a whole episode on the world of Narnia coming later this season.

For now ... though

FIVE MINUTE JESUS

In fact, I can do better than that. Here are a few minutes of CS Lewis' words on Jesus, from his essay "*What are we to make of Jesus Christ*" It's published in the out-of-print collection of Lewis essays titled – you guessed it - *Undeceptions*. Here it's read by our house voice actor Yannick Lawry. Thanks, Yannick:

EXCERPT - 'What Are We To Make of Jesus Christ?'

'What are we to make of Jesus Christ?' On the one hand, you have got the almost generally admitted depth and sanity of His moral teaching, which is not very seriously questioned, even by those who are opposed to Christianity. In fact, I find when I am arguing with very anti-God people that they rather make a point of saying, 'I am entirely in favour of the moral teaching of Christianity'—and there seems to be a general agreement that in the teaching of this Man and of His immediate followers, moral truth is exhibited at its purest and best. It is not sloppy idealism, it is full of wisdom and shrewdness.

The whole thing is realistic, fresh to the highest degree, and the product of a sane mind. That is one phenomenon. The other phenomenon is the quite appalling nature of this Man's theological remarks. You all know what I mean, and I want rather to stress the point that the appalling claim that this Man seems to be making is not merely made at one moment in His career. There is, of course, the one moment that led to His execution. The moment at which the High Priest said to Him, 'Who are you?' 'I am the Anointed, the Son of the uncreated God, and you shall see Me appearing at the end of all history as the judge of the universe.' But that claim, in fact, does not rest on this one dramatic moment.

When you look into His conversation you will find this sort of claim running throughout the whole thing. For instance, He went about saying to people, 'I forgive your sins.' Now it is quite natural for a man to forgive something you do to him. Thus if somebody cheats me out of five pounds it is quite possible and reasonable for me to say, 'Well, I

forgive him, we will say no more about it.' What on earth would you say if somebody had done you out of five pounds and I said, 'That is all right, I forgive him'?

Sometimes the statements put forward the assumption that He, the Speaker, is completely without sin or fault. This is always the attitude. 'You, to whom I am talking, are all sinners,' and He never remotely suggests that this same reproach can be brought against Him. He says again, 'I am the begotten of the One God; before Abraham was, I am,' and remember what the words 'I am' were in Hebrew. They were the name of God, which must not be spoken by any human being, the name which it was death to utter.

Well, that is the other side. On the one side clear, definite moral teaching. On the other, claims which, if not true, are those of a megalomaniac, compared with whom Hitler was the most sane and humble of men. There is no halfway house and there is no parallel in other religions. If you had gone to Buddha and asked him: Are you the son of Bramah?

he would have said, 'My son, you are still in the vale of illusion.' If you had gone to Socrates and asked, Are you Zeus?' he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to

Mohammed and asked, Are you Allah?' he would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius, Are you Heaven?', I think he would have probably replied, 'Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste.'

The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man. If you think you are a poached egg, when you are looking for a piece of toast to suit you, you may be sane, but if you think you are God, there is no chance for you. We may note in passing that He was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met him. He produced mainly three effects—Hatred—Terror—Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval. What are we to do about reconciling the two contradictory phenomena?

'What are we to make of Christ?' There is no question of what we can make of Him, it is entirely a question of what He intends to make of us. You must accept or reject the story. The things He says are very different from what any other teacher has said. Others say, 'This is the truth about the universe. This is the way you ought to go,' but He says, 'I am the Truth, and the Way, and the Life.' He says, 'No man can reach absolute reality, except through Me. Try to retain your own life and you will be inevitably ruined. Give yourself away and you will be saved.' He says, 'If you are ashamed of Me, if, when

you hear this call, you turn the other way, I also will look the other way when I come again as God without disguise.

If anything whatever is keeping you from God and from Me, whatever it is, throw it away. If it is your eye, pull it out. If it is your hand, cut it off. If you put yourself first you will be last. Come to Me everyone who is carrying a heavy load, I will set that right. Your sins, all of them, are wiped out, I can do that. I am Re-birth, I am Life. Eat Me, drink Me, I am your Food. And finally, do not be afraid, I have overcome the whole Universe.' That is the issue.

John Dickson:

There's a CS Lewis story attached to so many parts of Oxford but one place will always be on the pilgrimage trail for his fans—The famous 'Eagle and Child' pub that played host to one of the most famous writing clubs in English history.

When we visited it, it was boarded up, having just been bought by a hotel company. I'm hoping they will do something marvellous and respectful with it.

Simon Horobin:

Now we're standing outside a very sorry-looking 'Eagle and Child'. It hasn't been opened since the pandemic, but, you know, in Lewis's day, this was where The Inklings, that group of writers would regularly congregate on a Tuesday lunchtime. They had two meeting points in the week - the Tuesday lunchtimes in the 'Eagle and Child' or what they called the Bird and Baby. Then on a Thursday night in Lewis's rooms in Maudlin and they differed in what they did at them because Thursday night was the meeting where they would read out bits of their work in progress. And for Lewis, that was things like *The Problem of Pain*, which is his first work of Christian apologetics that really launched him as an apologist.

JD: *Why were they called The Inklings?*

SH: It was actually a name that they didn't make up themselves. When Lewis was at Oxford there was an undergraduate that was there after Lewis left called Edward Tangey Lean, who was doing PPE. And he set up a group called The Inklings at which he and his fellow undergraduates would read out some of their work in progress. And he invited a few senior members, one of whom was Tolkien, one of whom was Lewis. Like a lot of student groups, it kind of dwindled after a bit when people left and then Lewis and the people immediately in the Lewis circle carried on this tradition, um, of meeting and reading each other's works and they took that name and borrowed it.

The reason why inkling is such a nice name for it, of course, is it's an inkling is a kind of notion, half-baked idea, something you're thinking about, but also it's a nice pun because it sounds like someone who dabbles in ink - so they, they used it for that reason. I think one of the other important defining features of The Inklings that's easy to forget is that they were Christians. So it wasn't just people writing. It was people who were writing and interested in Christianity.

This was also the period, of course, when Tolkien is writing what was called the "new Hobbit book", which is what became *The Lord of the Rings* - that was obviously a major feature of it, but there was also quite a mixed group of people. Warney Lewis was writing works on 17th-century, French history. Lewis's doctor Humphrey Havard would come along and he would sometimes read accounts of his own latest mountaineering expedition. So it was quite a diverse collection, but at the same time they also discussed sort of questions of morality or Christian belief, or so for instance, there are records of a long discussion they had about cremation, um, or whether dogs have souls.

They had their own little room at the back called the 'Rabbit Room' so they were kind of set off from everybody else.

JD: *So how long did they meet for, as the inklings?*

SH: Well, they, it started sort of at the end of the thirties and carried on to the end of the forties pretty consistently. By the end of the forties, it was starting to dwindle partly because one of the really important members, Charles Williams, who had moved to Oxford during the war, he worked for the Oxford University Press based in London. But when he moved out to Oxford in the war, he came and met Lewis and they became really good friends. And he became a really important member of the inklings, although rather a divisive character because Tolkien wasn't so fond of him. That, that had an actually had an impact on their friendship. They started to kind of drift apart a bit because Tolkien, couldn't really understand why he was so enamoured by Williams.

Williams was influential for Lewis and things like *Hideous Strength*, you know, psychological thrillers - "shockers" as Lewis called them. But in 1945, Lewis was coming to one of the Tuesday morning meetings here and Williams was laid up in hospital having had an operation just up the road there, in the Ratcliff infirmary. And so Lewis diverted his journey to take a book for Williams to read and to take any messages he had for the rest of the gang down here at the Child. But he arrived to find that Williams had died completely unexpectedly. And Lewis was really distraught by this. And again, I think that that has an impact on The Inklings beginning to dwindle.

In fact, the landlord of the pub died as well in that period. Warnie talks about how important he was as a character in keeping that group going. So they carried on

meeting on Tuesday, even after Lewis had gone to Cambridge. So that's into the mid-fifties, but they switched it to a Monday so that Lewis could come down here, have a Monday morning meeting and a few pints and then they'd drive him up to the train station and he would get the train to Cambridge. So he still managed to keep it going. But I think they sort of drifted away by the end of the forties.

John Dickson:

There was also something else taking up Lewis' attention at that time ... a certain American woman called Joy Davidman.

Joy started off as a fan of Lewis' books. She was told by a friend who knew him that Lewis answered all his mail, so she wrote to him. He wrote back and they corresponded for a number of years.

None of those early letters survives, but it's clear they developed a deepening friendship based on their correspondence.

Then, in 1952 she announced that she was coming to England to meet him. A date was set. They would meet at a hotel for lunch.

Lewis' brother Warnie would describe her as, "...a Christian convert of Jewish race, medium height, good figure, horn-rimmed specs, quite extraordinarily uninhibited."

There's an amusing insight into what happens when American and English cultures clash, in the 1993 film *Shadowlands*, starring Anthony Hopkins as Lewis, and Debra Winger as Joy Davidman, the woman he came to love.

Shadowlands has been criticized for portraying Davidman as a woman motivated solely by love ... Alister McGrath's biography and others suggest otherwise ... but she definitely made a lasting impression on Lewis.

Simon Horobin:

She, well, she's Jewish by origin and she was an atheist for a period and she was coming to faith and Lewis's books were really important to her in that process. They met in fact at the East Gate pub up on the High Street, by the examination schools and had lunch there. And there are some interesting accounts of that first encounter and subsequent ones where she was obviously quite, you know, sort of surprisingly outspoken, and, you know, as an American coming into what was a really quite, you

know, male Oxford world where people were quite restrained and she was quite outspoken but in a way that Lewis evidently found quite refreshing.

She was obviously, you know, intellectually on the same level and could have very interesting discussions about issues of faith. She's also had similar interests, literary interests and fantasy, in science fiction and so on. There is a letter that survives from their early correspondence about an Arthur C. Clark novel that they've both been reading that shows that you know, they talked about literal matters and that Lewis was really genuinely interested in what she thought about things. And so she came to Oxford and while she was here, her marriage (as she was married) was in trouble and her husband was having an affair with a friend of hers. She came to Louis to ask what she should do about, you know, returning to America where she had this difficult relationship. They then got divorced and Lewis at that point agreed to a civil marriage with her, which was essentially something he was gonna keep quiet about, but it would enable her to apply for British citizenship.

So here just a few doors down from the Eagle and Child, we are at what in those days was actually the Oxford registry office and it was here that they got married. They actually have a copy of the certificate on the wall.

But of course, the idea behind that was that people didn't know, he didn't tell people he kept that private side of his life quite separate. But it wasn't intended that it would be a proper marriage in the sense that, you know, that it needed to be, it was a convenience for her in terms of her citizenship status, and keep her two young sons here in Britain away from a difficult relationship. And it was only shortly after that, that she discovered she had terminal cancer. And at that point, I think Lewis recognized the true strength of his feelings for her. At that point, he then decided that what he really wanted to do was have a full Christian ceremony and have a proper marriage. They then get married again up at the hospital in Headington where she was:

John Dickson:

Joy's health went up and down, but the cancer was never far away. Just three years after their *second* marriage, Joy died.

Simon Horobin:

And of course, that's the point where Lewis then writes *A Grief Observed* which is a, you know, kind of very heart-wrenchingly honest and open account of what he's going through. For somebody who wrote, you know, quite an academic work about pain back in 1940 it's, you know, it's an interesting return to that question and recognizing that the reality is much harder in some ways to deal with.

EXCERPT - A Grief Observed

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing. At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me.

I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me. There are moments, most unexpectedly, when something inside me tries to assure me that I don't really mind so much, not so very much, after all. Love is not the whole of a man's life. I was happy before I ever met H. I've plenty of what are called 'resources'. People get over these things. Come, I shan't do so badly. One is ashamed to listen to this voice but it seems for a little to be making out a good case. Then comes a sudden jab of red-hot memory and all this 'commonsense' vanishes like an ant in the mouth of a furnace.

How far have I got? Just as far, I think, as a widower of another sort who would stop, leaning on his spade, and say in answer to our inquiry, 'Thank 'ee. Musn't grumble. I do miss her something dreadful. But they say these things are sent to try us.' We have come to the same point; he with his spade, and I, who am not now much good at digging, with my own instrument. But of course one must take 'sent to try us' the right way. God has not been trying an experiment on my faith or love in order to find out their quality. He knew it already. It was I who didn't. In this trial He makes us occupy the dock, the witness box, and the bench all at once. He always knew that my temple was a house of cards. His only way of making me realize the fact was to knock it down.

CS Lewis, A Grief Observed

Simon Horobin:

Lewis himself died in 1963 three years after. Quite young really, at 65, in his house in Headington and is buried at the Holy Trinity church.

JD: *Was it a short period of ill health for him or extended?*

SH: It was fairly short, actually. There was a period where earlier than that, where he'd been hospitalized and it was thought that he might not recover from that, but he did make a full recovery from that. He was still working up to the point, you know, shortly beforehand, but then realized he couldn't.

Excerpt - *The Problem of Pain*

We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character. Here again, we come up against what I have called the “intolerable compliment.”

Over a sketch made idly to amuse a child, an artist may not take much trouble: he may be content to let it go even though it is not exactly as he meant it to be. But over the great picture of his life—the work which he loves, though in a different fashion, as intensely as a man loves a woman or a mother a child—he will take endless trouble—and would doubtless, thereby give endless trouble to the picture if it were sentient. One can imagine a sentient picture, after being rubbed and scraped and re-commenced for the tenth time, wishing that it were only a thumb-nail sketch whose making was over in a minute. In the same way, it is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny; but then we are wishing not for more love but for less.

CS Lewis - *The Problem of Pain*