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John 1:1-14 God's Christmas Gift to the World

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Introduction: Christmas is for children. Jesus came for everyone but the celebration really seems to be for children. Children are always intrigued by babies, and Christmas has the baby Jesus. Children can imagine angels and shepherds even if they can't understand what the angels sang or why the shepherds came. Children are fascinated by stars and lights more than we are. And children are much more comfortable than most of us to put on their best clothes, stand in front of a packed church, recite their Christmas piece loudly, and sing their Christmas songs eagerly even if a little off key. Children make us smile at Christmas: Their giggles and screams, their wide-open eyes, their absolute joy. Christmas is for children.

But Christmas is not cute. It is not simple or childish. On Christmas Day we look beyond the stable and the manger and we see the Son of God take on our humanity to save us from sin. God becomes flesh and blood and bones and muscles. God does not tell us this so we can understand it; the incarnation is a mystery beyond our reason or intelligence. God tells us so this so that we believe it. One of the ancients has said that the birth of Jesus is not a past event that we recall; it is a present event that we gaze at in wonder. Christmas proclaims, "This is what God does for you."

In the first chapter of his Gospel St. John tells us the Christmas story without a manger or a baby or swaddling clothes. He looks beneath and beyond the things that children love so well. In these verses—which are read on Christmas Day every year—John displays for us the unknowable and impossible love of God. John shows us

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John looks farther back than Bethlehem. **In the beginning was the Word.** John is writing about an entity, a person, who communicates what is in the mind of God. He is God's talk and he is God's tongue and so John calls him the Word. When time began the Word already existed: the Word **was** in the beginning. In that timelessness the Word knew what was in the mind of God because **the Word was with God**, face to face, eyeball to eyeball, thought for thought. In fact, **the Word was God.** John is giving us a glimpse into the relationship between the Father who is God and the Son who is God. Before creation, at creation, and ever since creation, nothing comes to exist without the work and the will of the Father and his Son. **The Word was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.** This truth about the Father and the Son is so sublime that Christians struggle to explain it. God is too far above us and the activity of the divine Word is unfathomable.

Here is John's Christmas story: **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.** At his conception the Son of God became fully and truly human. He had the body of a baby, then of a boy, and then of man. He ate and drank and slept and cried like we do, like all human beings do. The Word became flesh and **made his tent among us.** In Israel God revealed his glory in a tabernacle, a tent. Now God reveals his glory in the divine Word who has tented among us. You heard the writer in the Second Reading for today: **In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.** And God named his Son Jesus.

The Word became flesh so he could walk in our footsteps. He took on human form to endure bad weather and stormy seas, to experience sleepless nights and fierce hunger, to encounter physical pain and the lies of Satan. The man Jesus went through our troubles and trials and temptations but he did not give into them like we do, he did not use them as excuses like we do. **Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are, but he did not sin.** And then this sinless God-man drove himself to a cross where he offered his perfect life to his Father to make up for the sins of the world. There on the cross God the Father turned his face away from God the Son and so God was forsaken by God. And then Jesus died and it was finished. The debt was paid; the work was done.

Why would the Son of God care about human beings when he knew they would be hostile to him? What had any human ever done—what has any of us ever done—to warrant such attention? Why does God care about me when I can't get through a day without somehow sinning against him? The Word became flesh because he loves us. The Word took his place with the human race to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He did it because he loves us. The Word died his cross to release us from guilt of sin, to free from the dominance of Satan, and to spare us from the horror of hell. He did it because he loves us. The divine Word who is Jesus Christ lived and died so we can find joy in living and laugh at death. He did it because he loves us. He did it so we can understand sickness and endure suffering and deal with sadness. He did this because he loved us. God's Christmas gift to the world—God's Christmas gift to us—is that **the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.** The incarnation of the Son of God is a miracle story about perfect love. And this gracious gift gains us life with God.

2. In him was life. John wrote, **and that life was the light of men.** The life that Jesus lived on earth gained life with God for the people on earth. Jesus brought human beings back together with God. That's what real life is: living and breathing in the presence of God. That life became a beam of light that lit up the world. **The light shines in darkness,** John wrote, **and the darkness has not overcome it.** Without Jesus the world is pitch black. People exist in complete confusion with no help and no hope, no confidence and no comfort. But that darkness is not thick enough or dense enough to dim the light. The light that Jesus brings is so brilliant and bright that it pierces the darkness.

When the time came for Jesus to come to the world, John the Baptist announced his coming. **John came as a witness to testify concerning that light, but he himself was not the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.** And then Jesus came. He preached and taught, he forgave and healed, and called his followers and sent them out to the world. For the most part **the world did not recognize him.** Even the leaders of Israel rejected him: **He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.**

And then he came to us, to each one of us. His light penetrated the robe we wore at our baptism and it touched our hearts. His light glowed before us when we heard the gospel and it opened our minds. With that light we joined the great assembly of those who **received him** by faith **and believed in his name.** To us and to them **he gave the right to become children of God.** And we had nothing to do with any of this. We didn't turn on the light that entered our hearts; we didn't adopt ourselves into the family of God. We were not born because **of natural descent** or because of our nationality or heredity. We were not born **by human decision**—we did not make a choice for Jesus. We were not born because of **a husband's will** or a mother's wish. God made me his child in a miracle of his love and did the same for you. The light of Christ shines in our hearts by grace. God's Christmas gift to the world **is the light that shines through the darkness.** It is the light that shines in us.

While all things were in quiet silence and the night was in the midst of her course, the divine Word leaped down from his royal throne. Christmas is not cute. It is not simple or childish. It comes with mysteries that we cannot understand or even explain. At Christmas each year we see a mystery of love so profound that it impacted the relationship between God and his Son; a mystery of love so deep that God's Son became like us to remake us in the image of God; a mystery of love so immense that Jesus beamed his light into our hearts and gave us life with God. **And now we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.** With that sight, Christmas is truly blessed. Amen.

Pastor James Tiefel