

"The Word Became Flesh"

John 1:1-18

2nd Sunday After Christmas

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Bethel Presbyterian Church

West Union, IA

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Gospel Reading

For our gospel reading this morning, we hear the prologue to the Gospel According to John. The very beginning of the gospel account, but in these poetic verses we are taken back to before the beginning of time. "In the beginning..." John says. In the beginning, the same words of the very beginning of our scripture, Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." But, the Word, John says, was there even before the beginning, before the beginning of creation, when God's Word spoke everything into being. What can such lofty words mean to us? How can we relate to such other worldly claims? Listen to the John, chapter 1, verses 1 through 18, and hear how the Word of God relates to you and to me:

^{1:1} In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God.

³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

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

⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")

¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Here we are eleven days from Christmas when we were steeped in the wondrous birth narratives of Matthew and Luke. Stories filled with angels and virgins, stable and shepherds, even Magi. There really is nothing like the story of that first Christmas when it comes to hearing about the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Today, still in the Christmas season, we hear the beginning of the Gospel of John. There is no doubt that this is an origin story, but as a birth narrative it leaves something to be desired. This is an origin story on a cosmic scale. A beginning reaching back to before creation itself.

John tells us that the Word was in the beginning, it was with God, and it was God. God and the Word were one, before the very beginning of time. And, the Word was life and light. The life that came into being, and the light that shined in the darkness. Everything that is, everything that ever was and ever will be came from the Word/God. Nothing that is, is not from the Word/God. Everything that exists is connected to the Word/God by nature of its very existence.

Where this all became relevant to us, is when this Word/God, this life, this light was coming into the world. The very world that was created was now the place where the Word/God chose to dwell. Verse 14 says: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." The Greek word translated lived, has its root in the noun for tent, or tabernacle, as the Tabernacle of the Lord, where God dwelled among the people of Israel. John says that the Word/God pitched its tent in the world; came to live among the people.

The Message, Eugene Peterson's *Bible in Contemporary Language*, says that, "The Word...moved into the neighborhood." The Word/God that existed before time, created everything imaginable, the very life of creation, and the true light that overcame and still overcomes the darkness, took on human form and moved into the neighborhood, your neighborhood, my neighborhood, every neighborhood, everywhere. Think about that for a moment.

"The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

Because the Word/God has taken on flesh and chose to dwell in the world, we, all those who receive him and believe in his name, have seen his glory. This is

the Old Testament sense of glory as the manifest presence of God. The presence that made covenant with Abraham, spoke to Moses from the burning bush, led the people through the sea and the desert, and appeared to Moses in the Tabernacle. That presence of God, the glory of God, appears to us as a father's only son, bringing and showing us the grace and truth of the One God. And in verse 17 John tells us that the grace and truth of the Word/God came to us through Jesus Christ. The child born in the manger on that Christmas night, the glorious night that we celebrated 11 days ago.

You see, it is great to celebrate Christmas. It is great to hear the stories and sing the carols, light the candles, and stage pageants. Because it is in those stories that we hear about the angel comforting the virgin, assuring the carpenter, and announcing the birth to the shepherds. It is those stories that we learn how the savior of the world was born in a stable, and how that small child welcomed kings and threatened the power of rulers. But it is here, in the prologue to John, that we learn who that child really is. The child born that night is none other than the Word/God, the Word/God of creation and all that exists, the Word/God became flesh in a child, in our neighborhood, a child who shows us the life, the light, the grace, and the truth of God.

The final verse of our reading, verse 18, says: "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." Jesus Christ, God's only Son, is the one who makes God known to God's people; the ones who accept him and believe in his name. Jesus Christ, as the Word/God made flesh shows us God. If you want to see God and know God, then see Christ and know Christ. For in Christ, God is revealed to us in a new way that the world has never seen before. Scripture tells us about God, but Jesus shows us God, because Jesus Christ, the child in the manger, is God made flesh, and living among us.

In just a few minutes, we will gather around this table of the Lord, and we will share in the feast that our Lord prepares. A simple meal of bread and cup, but this meal is more than that. This meal is the gift of our Lord to all of us. This meal nourishes us in a way that no other meal can. John tells us that the Word became flesh, and Jesus tells us that this bread is his body given for us. When we partake in this meal we are partaking in the body and blood of Christ. At this table, Jesus is both the host and the feast, feeding us in a very real sense. And through this meal we receive the grace and truth of God, the Word, our Lord. So, come to this table to receive the grace upon grace of God's only Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Let us pray:

Word of God, you came to the world to show us life and light and your glory. You dwell among us to share your grace and teach us your truth. Help us to see and hear and understand your message to us this and every day. Guide us through the year to come so that our life may be a testament to your life and light. Illuminate us with your light and feed us with your flesh.

AMEN.