

Theme: Unwrapping God's Christmas Message

Text: John 1:1-14

1 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.

Every year at Christmas time Christians around the world hear once again the familiar story of Jesus' birth... A virgin mother... no room in the inn... a stable and a manger... angels and shepherds... A Savior has been born to you – he is Christ the Lord.

With the Christmas season beginning so early every year I wonder if we are ever tempted to let this old familiar story grow... well... old. As soon as Halloween's over we hear Christmas music on the radio. At home and even at church we deck the halls with Christmas trees and lights and wreaths before December's even here. We buy our gifts. We write our cards. We go to Advent worship on Sundays... and Christmas concerts... and a Children's service... then Christmas Eve... and now here we are today... and I wonder if some of us by this point aren't just ready to move on from Christmas?

But then I need to remind myself... If that were true, then why are you all here today? If you were really ready to move on from Christmas you could be home right now in front of the tree or the fire sipping your coffee and cocoa and enjoying the calm after the Christmas storm... But you're here. Here in God's house to hear once again the good news of great joy that is for all people. You're here because as Christians you realize the greatest present you can open on Christmas Day isn't found under a tree but in the Bible where we hear God's Word... and today where we see God's Word made flesh... Let's spend a few moments this morning unwrapping God's Christmas Message together.

Did you know that you have something in common with the first people who heard this message recorded by the apostle John? John was a disciple of Jesus who lived longer than any of the other 12 apostles. And in his old age John wrote this Gospel to people who had already heard the Christmas gospel from Matthew and Luke... to people who were familiar with God's Word and the good news about Jesus Christ. But just like you, John knew that these people could never hear the Christmas story too many times. And so, for people who knew the old, old story John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrapped up the Christmas gospel once more for God's people to open. But unlike the unwanted presents we re-gift to others, this gift would not disappoint. It was repackaged by John not to hide its ugliness or conceal the original giver... No, it was wrapped in words so simple and yet profound that

the gift would shine even brighter... the giver be revealed even clearer... than the first time you opened this Christmas gift... the first time you heard the Christmas story.

John begins by taking us back to... the beginning. Because if you want to fully appreciate the gift of the Christchild at Christmas you must first go back to where it all began... **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made (John 1:1-3)**. With those words, **In the beginning**, our minds immediately are transported back to Genesis chapter one: **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1)**. Before John gets to Christmas he goes back to creation. And yet we hear something about creation that perhaps we didn't stop to consider before... God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, was not the only one present at creation. **The Word was with God**. And who was this person mysteriously described as **The Word? The Word was God...** And yet we are told that while **the Word was God** he was also **with God in the beginning**. The word "with" in the original language describes someone who was face to face with God... How could God – who is only one God – be face to face with... God!?

Here we see in simple words that defy all human logic the eternal mystery of our God who is one and yet more than one. Father, Son, and, as we see elsewhere in Scripture, Holy Spirit – three persons yet only one God. One essence. Yet distinct from each other. How can this be? Well... God does not tell us we need to understand how he can be 3 and 1 at the same time. He simply reveals it to be who he is. It's been said that as Christians this should actually bring us great comfort. Because if we could use our human minds to figure out the Trinity then maybe the God of the Bible is only that... the product of our minds... something man-made. The fact that I can't even understand God's essence shows just how much bigger he is than I. He is God and I am not. I can no more fit an understanding of the eternal Trinity into my finite mind than a child could fit the ocean into a bucket at the beach.

And yet although we'll never fully comprehend our God in this life... we can know our God. In fact, he made certain we would know all we need to know about him in order to be saved. And looking back at our sermon text that's exactly what we see John describing... **The Word was with God and the Word was God... the Word became flesh...** How did God make himself known to sinful people who could not be in his presence? Sinful people whose fallen human mind could not comprehend him? Well, God revealed himself through his Word. He spoke to his people through his prophets... explaining his demands: **Be holy, because I the LORD your God, am holy (Leviticus 19:2)**... and describing our lost condition: **There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins (Ecclesiastes 7:20)**... he pointed to his perfect solution: **The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14)**... and in the fullness of time God the Father would reveal his will and show us his heart in a new way.... The Bible says: **In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Hebrews 1:1-2)**.

And so, God the Son left his Father's side in heaven and became the Word made flesh – became our brother, our Savior, and in doing so allowed mankind to see God... to touch him... to live with him and laugh and cry with him... He became Immanuel – the God who is with us... **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us**. Are there any words in Scripture more profound than this description of the Christmas miracle? It's no great wonder that John would give him the title: **The Word**. Words communicate who we are and how we feel... words describe for others the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. That is exactly what Jesus is. When God the Son took on human flesh, he did so in order to reveal who God is... to communicate the Father's love... and he not only revealed the thoughts and intentions of God's heart, he carried them out as he fulfilled God's Word.

John describes how the Word of God – Jesus Christ – is the life that gives light to all people. He described how John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus to be that light... a theme we contemplate often in

the weeks leading up to Christmas. But you notice that the apostle John reminds us that though Jesus was the light that came to scatter the darkness of sin there were still those who could not see him... who could not see God in him... because they refused to receive him. **He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.** Does that mean that we who have received him deserve a pat on the back for our good sense to invite the Savior of the world into our lives? No! We no more earned the right to be God's children than we earn a gift at Christmas. A Christmas gift is given... all gifts are given... that's why it's called a gift. If it's earned it ceases to be a gift... it's a paycheck... it's what you deserve.

But when John speaks of the gift Jesus gives to those who do receive him, he makes it very clear what he means by "receive him." **To all who received him, [that is] to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.** What does it mean to receive Jesus? It means to believe in Jesus! And is this something we do? No! God gives us the right to become children of God through faith... this isn't a decision that we make, it's one God makes. And so, we rightly call this a gift! The apostle Paul describes this so beautifully in his letter to the Ephesians where he writes: **It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).**

Yes, today we are looking at the greatest gift ever given – the Word made flesh. But let's not miss out on the extra gift God tucks away in this text... revealing that he gives the gift of faith too... the gift of adoption into his family... this is grace on top of grace. Not only does he send his Son to earn our forgiveness, he makes sure we believe it as the Holy Spirit works in our hearts through his powerful Word.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Yes, by the power of God's Spirit we are given the gift of faith which trusts in the Word of God – Jesus Christ. Jesus who revealed the heart of God to the world... who kept his Father's will and fulfilled his Father's laws ... Jesus – the Word of God who became flesh... flesh that was swaddled by Mary and placed in a manger... flesh that would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities... flesh that would be raised in glory and honor... flesh and blood that we will eat and drink in the Sacrament for our forgiveness... and that will come again to bring our mortal flesh into eternal glory... Yes, today we see his glory, **the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father...** And in him we receive the gifts of grace... and truth... and life eternal.

While we could spend all day unwrapping God's Christmas Message, I hope that you've enjoyed the time we have spent... unwrapping God's Christmas Word made flesh. This is a message that we'll never tire of hearing... a gift that will never grow old... and a gift we'll continue to unwrap as we grow in our faith and knowledge of God's Word revealed in the Babe of Bethlehem.

Merry Christmas my brothers and sisters in Christ! Come, let us adore him today and hail him always who is God in the flesh. Christ the Savior is born! Amen.