

**Home in the Word**

CHRISTMAS EVE

December 24, 2020

**John 1: 1-14**

*<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup> in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

*<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*

*<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup> 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.*

**Titus 2: 11-14**

*<sup>11</sup> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, <sup>12</sup> training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, <sup>13</sup> while we wait for the blessed hope and*

*the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. <sup>14</sup> He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.*



Good evening! Tonight, as we gather on this most sacred evening, we are each drawn towards the Christ child and we are drawn together as brothers and sisters

in Christ. Tonight, we celebrate the fact that God set aside the distance of the heavens in order to be so close, to be so near, and to make a home with us – with his children who he created, who he loves, and who he wants to save. As we begin, let us pray...

If you have a Bible with you or have one on your phone or tablet, turn with me to the gospel of John, chapter one. As we turn to John's gospel, we begin tonight's message with two questions to consider. The first is this: Why would God, the creator of the universe and everything in it, ever want to take on flesh? The second is this: Why would Jesus, the one who is eternal, want to be a part of our broken and messy world? The simple answer to these two questions is "love". The one whose birth we celebrate tonight took on flesh and chose to be a part of our messy and broken world because he loves us. If you hear nothing else tonight, hear this: you are loved.





John's gospel begins with these words: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"*. These words connect Jesus to the beginning of time, whenever that was, and to God.

In verse three we read that *"all things came into being through him"* and that in Jesus we find life and light. The light of Jesus shines in the darkness. His light continues to shine because the darkness cannot overcome the light.

As we continue to unpack the opening verses to John's gospel, we pick up the story of John the Baptist. He was the *"man sent from God"* who came as a witness to *"testify to the light"*. In verse nine we read, *"The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world"*. John the Baptist witnesses to the birth of Christ, the one we welcome tonight, the one born in the manger.

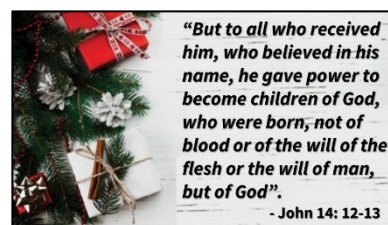
When you think about the night that Jesus was born, the one we read about in the passage from Luke's gospel, perhaps you have an image something like this one. In our imagination we see Mary and Joseph kneeling beside Jesus, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, gentle animals gathering around, gazing upon the baby boy. If you've ever been in the delivery room, you know that this would not really be the scene in the Bethlehem stable where Jesus was born. And if you're ever been around farm animals, especially sheep, you know that they would not be standing around in a neat little semi-circle giving their full attention to this little baby. This image and others like it are far cries from the reality of how God entered the world. The stable in Bethlehem was probably stinky and dirty and messy and loud and sloppy. In reality, it was probably a lot like our daily lives are some of the time.





Yet, just as it is often with our lives, there was a beauty to the stable as well. In the gift of life, in the instant love that a parent feels for their newborn child, in the realization that there is now a family to care for and to provide for – there is a simple and sweet beauty. This too is true of the scene that unfolded just over 2,000 years ago in tiny Bethlehem. On the night that Christ was born, God took on our nature, took on our form, and came into a world that was both broken and beautiful. God took on flesh to unite our story to his story in a new and intimate and personal way. As Jesus lived out his life here on earth, he lived among us and with us, bringing light into the messy, dirty, broken, and hurting world.

Returning to John's gospel, we pick up the passage in verses ten and eleven. Here we read these words: *"He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him"*. This is part of the reality of faith. With faith, there is an element of choice. Even in his day, some of the world rejected Jesus. Even his own people, the Jews, did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, as the Savior. This remains true today. Not all people who know who Jesus is accept him as the Lord of their life. Maybe that is true for some folks joining us tonight for Christmas Eve worship. If so, please hear these next words from John. In verses twelve and thirteen John writes: *"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God"*.



To all who receive him, to all who believe in Jesus as their Savior, Jesus gives the power to be a child of God. This birth, this second birth, is the gift of new life. It is a life full of grace and truth. It is a birth that leads us to become brothers and sisters of Jesus, heirs of a life of hope and peace, love and joy.



Turn with me in your Bibles to our epistle reading for today, to the letter to Titus, chapter 2. At the beginning of worship, we read the traditional Christmas story from

the gospel of Luke. In Luke's passage we were reminded of the trip to Bethlehem and the birth in the manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. We were reminded of the angel's visit to the shepherds and the shepherd's visit to see the baby Jesus. They left praising God they shared the good news with all they met – who were amazed at the story. Next, we read a passage from the gospel of John. John spoke of the light that was coming into the world, the light that shines in the darkness. And John reminded us too that all who believe in Jesus will be born of God, becoming children of God. Our passage from Titus 2 begins to draw our attention to what faith in Jesus Christ really means.

The letter to Titus was written by a colleague – Paul. The letter deals with the characteristics of a transformed life. We become transformed into new creations when we accept Jesus and become children of God. So, my friends, this letter is written to us, to you and to me. Paul first reminds Titus, and of course us, that God brought salvation to all in Jesus Christ. The first characteristic that Paul details is living a life of piety or holiness. Such a life reveals one's devotion to

God. This involves distancing oneself from the things of this world and living a



*"self-controlled, upright, and godly"* life. Living the

Christian life allows others to see the joy, peace, hope, and love of Christ alive in us. After reminding Titus, and us, that Jesus *"gave himself up for us"* – Jesus died for

us – to redeem us from our sins and to make us right before God, he goes on to the second characteristic. Jesus redeems us for a purpose in this life. In verse fourteen we read about it. Jesus redeems us to make us a *"people of his own who are zealous for good deeds"*.

Paul is connecting a basic truth of the Christian life. A life of piety or holiness is a life of service to others. A life



of service seeks to share the light and love of Christ. Jesus called his followers to be a humble servant in the kingdom of God, just as Jesus himself was. Living a life of faith leads us to place the needs of others ahead of our own needs and to work for justice and peace in our world. Thinking of others first, giving of oneself simply as a gift to another – these things do not come naturally to humanity. Because of this, God came in the flesh and dwelt among us. Taking on flesh, Jesus was born in a manger, humbly and vulnerably becoming one of us.

As I draw to a close tonight, I return to the two questions that we began this time with: Why would God, the creator of the universe and everything in it, ever want to take on flesh? And: Why would Jesus, the one who is eternal, want to be a part of our broken and messy world?



Earlier I said the simple answer was “love”. Because of love, the creator of the universe, took on flesh and dwelt among us. Only a divine love for you and me would lead God to step out of the beauty and perfection of heaven to enter this messy and broken world. Because of love, the eternal one became part of our world and part of our lives. Humanity needed to be shown what it looked like to live out God’s love in the world. This is why Jesus Christ took on flesh and came to live amongst us, teaching us how to love one another just as God loves us. When we invite Jesus into our lives, he comes and dwells in us, making a home in our heart. In turn, we find a home in the Word.



So, my friends, as we celebrate the birth of Christ tonight, we too are charged to go out and to dwell among humanity, being God’s love in the world. As we seek to live a life devoted to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, may we go forth into the world to make his light and love know. May it be so for me and for you. Amen and amen.