

*Grace Lutheran Community, 25<sup>th</sup> December, 2021: Christmas Day*

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<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 were created through Him, and without Him nothing was created that was created... <sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1-3,14

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God's grace and peace be with you.

Christmas is a wonderful time of year for us as Christians. Have you ever thought how fortunate you are to have faith in the Jesus of Christmas? What do you think Christmas would really be like if you didn't have faith in Jesus? What would it be like to have absolutely no faith in Jesus, and to be entirely opposed to Him?

As we think about what Christmas is really all about, we have this wonderful word from the Gospel of John about "the Word became flesh", and "through Him all things were made." This is a word that reminds us of the true mystery of God, and the truly incredible nature of what Christmas is really all about.

We know that Christmas is about God entering this world in Jesus. But, as the Bible Reading from Saint John reminds us, this is the God who has created everything.

At this time there is an incredible NASA Mission, the Perseverance Rover Mission, that is taking images from the surface of Mars (to view, [click on this link](#)). Think about this then... the God who made everything, who 'spoke everything into being', has come to this earth in the person of Jesus. And then think of babies being knit together in their mother's womb. And the God who has made each of us has Himself become a baby!

And then think of this... over the Christmas weekend hundreds of millions of people will be gathering in church building all around the world to remember the birth of Jesus in this world. This reminds us of the powerful impact Jesus has had in this world. As some have said, if you do not believe in God, what do you see as our origin and purpose? Are we just 'blobs of life' floating through space who have to make the best for some 'meaning of life'? How do you respond to pain and suffering and death if you have no faith in something beyond what we believe we can think and see? We sometimes say at Easter "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!" But the same applies at Christmas: "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

Our theme this year is that Jesus brings us together. And this is much more than warm fuzzy feelings in church and family gatherings. This is about something that is vastly deeper, and a true spiritual experience, that changes the way we see everything in this world, and this life.

If we keep in mind the vastness and beauty and complexity of the universe (with all its 'mysteries'), together with the beauty and complexities and intimacies

associated with the conception and birth of every single person who has ever been and ever will be, together with the birth of Jesus Himself that has inspired billions of people in faith, and then, as we come to these very profound words given through Saint John (which anyone would have to say are 'inspired' in some way), we are called to reflect upon the incredibly deep mysteries of Christmas, and what it really means that "Jesus brings us together."

The Apostle John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were created through Him, and without Him nothing was created that was created." This is all about Jesus. And then Saint John says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Throughout his 'gospel, John describes the "Word of life" from the beginning as something that has become flesh, something heard, seen, looked upon, and handled (1 John. 1:1, cf. John. 1:1). This Word is the life manifested from the Father (1:2), and the apostles have seen it and heard it and declared it as witnesses so that all who hear their testimony may have fellowship with them and with the Father and the Son (1:3). This fellowship is fullness of joy (1:4). The message they proclaim is that God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all (1:5). Therefore, fellowship with God in His light means that we do not walk in darkness, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1:6-7). God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all sin (1:8-10).

What have you heard and seen and looked at and handled over the last few weeks? As you have sought to celebrate Christmas as Christians, you have heard and seen and looked at and handled the Word of Life. The whole point of the presents, the tree, the meals, the songs, the big lunches, the gatherings of various sorts – the whole point of all of it is Jesus, the Word of Life. We gave because He gave. We celebrated because He came. We rejoiced because we have fellowship with Him and with one another. But this fellowship is only possible because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). God became a human person in order to reconcile all things in His flesh. As the Apostle Paul writes (Colossians 1:21-22: NMB): "And you, who were in times past strangers and enemies because your minds were set in evil works, he has now reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to make you holy, unblameable, and without fault in His own sight." Regarding this, Saith Paul also says (Ephesians 2:15-16: NKJV): "Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity."

So, the Word became flesh in order to reconcile us to God and one another. The Word became flesh in order to abolish the enmity between us and God and one another, making true peace and fellowship. This is the only basis for Christian joy (1 Jn. 1:3-4). This fellowship is through the cleansing of the blood of Christ (1 John 1:6-7). And the blood of Christ cleanses us as we confess our sins to God and one another (1 John 1:9).

Christian joy is real joy because it built on the truth of Jesus Christ. But as descendants of Adam and Eve, we have not only inherited their guilt and tendency to sin, we have also inherited their tendency to try to hide their sin. They tried to hide their nakedness with fig leaves, and they tried to hide from God in the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:7-8). In the presence of God, all darkness is shade. Sin is turning away from God's light, and that darkness includes trying to hide our guilt, trying to cover our shame. Even true Christians are still tempted to do this. This is why the Bible teaches us that dealing with our sin right away is enormously important.

John clearly says that the heart of Christian fellowship is fullness of joy (1 John 1:3-4). And this is echoed in other places, specifically related to confession and forgiveness of sin. In Psalm 32, David sings, "Happy is the one whose transgression is forgiven... When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long... I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and He forgave the iniquity of my sin... Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but those who trust in the Lord, mercy shall surround them. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous: and shout for joy, all you that are upright in heart" (Psalm 32:1, 3, 5, 10-11).

Christ was born in order that we might know God, that we might have fellowship with the Father and the Son by the Spirit. And this fellowship is the fullness of peace and joy. And this peace and joy is maintained and enjoyed by the application of the blood of Jesus to every bump and bruise by confession of sin and forgiveness. Confession of sin agrees with God by naming the sin biblically and asks Him and any offended parties for forgiveness. God forgives us by promising not to hold our sin against us for the sake of Christ. And this forgiveness is not based on our feelings. Forgiveness is based on the fact of the Cross of Jesus – where God is truly here 'in the flesh' to work the gift of eternal life and eternal fellowship with Him, and with one another.

The Word made flesh testifies to God's grace – that is, His undeserved love for us. Our sinful hearts cannot fathom sacrificing ourselves for our enemies. (Can you imagine sacrificing your life to save the life of a terrorist bomber?) But God can and did, and the manger is proof. The manger is where God proved that He so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16) The manger is the place where God says that a fiery hell is not the home He wants for us. The manger is the place where God puts His finger up to our lips and says, "Stop trying to earn My love – because here, in this baby I give you the one thing I love most." The manger is the place where God wants us to drop our sins, our problems, worries and concerns – so that His Son can carry them to the cross to pay for them and remove them forever. The manger is where we come to receive life. And it's the reason we are confident that death will serve as the gateway back to God's presence in His heavenly family. Or again, as John puts it: "To all who received Him, 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."

Until then, the Word is the truth that leads us through this dark world. Not one truth among many. Not a truth that is true for some people but fails for others. But the one, certain, reliable, unchanging truth of the one, true God. The Word made flesh in the manger is what we must cling to in a world that is still filled with darkness.

There is the darkness of the world that tries to convince us that there is no God (or, if there is, that he's absent and uninterested), the darkness that tries to convince us that the manger is only one of many perfectly valid ways to achieve godliness, the darkness that tries to convince us that God is still angry with us, still demanding more from us, still expecting us to work our way up to Him. There is the darkness of our own guilty hearts that tries to convince us that God couldn't possibly love sinners like us.

The truth of the manger is that God loves us so much that He became one of us. The truth of the manger is that He wants us to live with Him forever, and that faith in the baby lying in the manger is the only way for that to happen. Like the Wise Men following the star to the manger, follow this light because it is the one and only path back to God, the one and only truth that will never change, the one and only place that we can know what God really thinks. And the best part is that what God thinks is better than we ever could have imagined: He loves us so much that He sent His Son to live, die and rise for us. That is the matchless testimony of the Word made Flesh in a manger in Bethlehem.

As Saint John writes elsewhere (1 John 1:1-4): "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make your joy complete."

Look closely at the baby in the manger. Lying there in the hay, that's God Himself, God's heart revealed. See His little eyes filled with compassion and love for you. See His little hands and little feet that He will allow to be pierced with nails for you. See His tiny head that will wear a crown of thorns for you. See a tiny chest with a tiny heart that beats with eternal love for you. In that manger is your God and your Saviour. He is the reason we celebrate today. Place your trust in Him and you will have a very blessed Christmas. Amen