

Pastor Chris Matthis
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Christmas Day
Tuesday, December 25th, 2018

Sermon: In the Beginning

Text: John 1:1-14

Focus: Jesus is the eternal Word made flesh.

Function: That they would marvel at the miracle of the Incarnation.

Structure: Story-Applied

Locus: “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord...” (SC, 2nd Article of Apostles’ Creed).

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Each of the Gospels handles the Christmas story differently. Matthew gives a succinct account to show how Jesus’ virgin birth fulfills the Immanuel prophecy from Isaiah. Luke starts with the Annunciation by the angel Gabriel and then moves on to all the business about Caesar’s census, the journey to Bethlehem, the angels, and the shepherds. Mark doesn’t mention it at all. John begins “in the beginning” *before* the beginning—before space and time. He starts with the eternal Logos, the Word of God who is the second Person of the Trinity. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1, ESV).¹

The entire chapter of John 1 reads more like poetry than a story. It has some of the simplest language in all of Scripture—and yet some of the most complex meanings. John’s words are a far cry from the action-packed narrative we heard last night on Christmas Eve. And yet the Church saw fit to capture this beautiful meditation for us to hear and read each year on Christmas Day.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Words was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). These words reverberate with echoes of the creation account in Genesis 1: “In the

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Yet John speaks of a time *before* time when the Word of God dwelt with God and, indeed, shared the very life of God. “He was in the beginning with God” (v. 2). John calls this Word a He, not an “it.” More than mere personification, He is a Person, the source of all life and light (v. 4). “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (v. 3). And so this eternal Word was the source and life of all creation: from the tiniest subatomic particle to the furthest-flung galaxies—and everything in between, including you and me.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” (John 1:14a). This is the miracle of Christmas, the moment upon which all of history hinges. Everything prior to the Incarnation is B.C., “Before Christ.” And everything after is “A.D.,” *Anno Domini*, the year of our Lord. All of human history looked forward to the coming of God’s Son, the Word Incarnate. Incarnation literally means “in the meat” or “in the flesh.” The Incarnation, what C.S. Lewis calls the Grand Miracle, is the source of all other miracles. Without the manger, there is no cross or empty tomb. Without Christmas, there is no Good Friday or Easter. So the Word became flesh. God came down from heaven and put skin on so that he could save us from our sins. The Creator became a creature. Now God has “skin in the game,” as they say. And the world will never be the same. And if we are willing to marvel at this miracle at it all, then *we* will never be the same either.

Most people do not believe in Jesus Christ. It is easy to disregard the Christmas story as a fable or fairytale. It’s easy to dismiss Jesus’ teachings as just good advice and not the very Word of life. It’s easy to pretend that peace on earth and goodwill toward men are brought about by our own efforts instead of by the Prince of Peace. That is nothing new: “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and

his own people did not receive him” (vv. 10-11). (Even his own brothers did not believe in him [7:5]).

But it doesn't have to be that way with you:

“But to all who did receive him, *who believed in his name*, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (vv. 12-13).

I am certain that you have already opened all your Christmas presents. You probably have a pile of wrapping paper, ribbons, and bows strewn about the living room to be cleaned up after you get home from church. Maybe you got what you hoped for. Maybe you didn't. But don't forget that the greatest gift of all is the one that came on the first Christmas wrapped in human flesh: Immanuel, the Word-made-flesh, God-*with-us* instead of “God-Up-There somewhere.”² “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...” (John 3:16a). God so loved *you* that he gave his only-begotten Son. If we believe in him, we will be born again, not by human decision or by right of birth, but by water and the Spirit (John 3:3, 5). The birth of Christ makes way for the new birth in Baptism.

Christmas is not about lights and trees and Santa and Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer, or even time off with family. Christmas is about Christ and a God who loves us so much that he didn't abandon us to ourselves. Instead, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” He made his home with us—and *in us*.

Frederick Buechner helps us to wonder anew at the Grand Miracle:

“The Word become flesh. Ultimate mystery born with a skull you could crush one-handed. Incarnation. It is not tame.... It is unthinkable darkness riven with unbearable light. Agonized labor led to it, vast upheavals of intergalactic space/time split apart, a wrenching and tearing of the very sinews of reality itself. You can only cover your eyes

² Barbara Brown Taylor, “Past Perfection,” in *Home by Another Way* (Lanham: Cowley Publications, 1999), 24.

and shudder before it, before *this*: ‘God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God... who for us and our salvation,’ as the Nicene Creed puts it, ‘came down from heaven.’”³

“And we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14b). If that doesn’t blow your mind, I don’t know what else will. God came down at Christmas. He dwelt among us. And he will never leave us ever again. Now the dwelling place of God is with humanity, and he will be our God, and we will be his people (Rev. 21:3). In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.

³ Frederick Buechner, “Christmas,” in *Beyond Words: Daily Readings in the ABC’s of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2004), 61.