

“In the Beginning...”
Sermon delivered 1-3-10
Immanuel Lutheran Church
Neal Collins, Pastor

John 1: [1-9] 10-18

[In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.] ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And 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.'") ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Our Gospel for this Sunday, the second Sunday after Christmas, is most appropriate for the beginning of this New Year. John does a re-cap, like the news looking back over the last year. John opens his Gospel with the words from Genesis, “In the beginning...” “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God! All things came into being through him.” This life force came into the world. “The Word became flesh and dwells among us full of grace and truth.” These words need to be sung not spoken as the eternal God took on human form in Jesus. The invisible becomes visible. I would love to see how Stephen Spielberg would dramatize this on the big screen in a movie called, “The Cosmic Christ”.

Our Gospel lesson this morning is known as the other Christmas story. We traditionally hear the Christmas story from Matthew or Luke. We are most familiar with Zechariah and Elizabeth, the Angel Gabriel and Mary, Mary and Joseph on the way to Bethlehem, the Angels and the Shepherds, the gold, frankincense, and myrrh as gifts from the Wise Man. John's Christmas Story would be difficult to present as a Christmas program with our young children. Yet, John's Christmas is more that pageantry. John is about what happens after the angels return to heaven, the shepherds go from the fields, and the Wise Men go home a different way. John's Christmas story is more than the story of Jesus, it is the story of God. (New Interpreters Bible/O'Day/John/pg.52)

John's Christmas is about seeing the face of God in Jesus. God walking into the world, the cosmos, of darkness, sin, and evil, with the purpose of saving the world. "In the beginning was the WORD..." For John, this is the mind of God, the "logos", this mind of God became flesh, having existed before time. Hearing "the word became flesh..." is different from hearing skin and bones and sins of the flesh. There are two Greek words for flesh, one is "Soma", meaning skin and bones, and the other is "soma", meaning the mind of God taking on human form in Jesus. Christianity is the only world religion to present the incarnation of God, as the song goes, from "the sky to earth, from the earth to the grave." For John, the Christmas story is the face of God in Jesus.

John's Christmas story is the revelation of God as light. This isn't a story "about" God, this IS God. When we say, "The Gospel of the Lord", this is the Lord speaking to you, not just some nice words about God. "The True Light that enlightens every one was coming into the world. He was in the world, yet the world knew him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become Children of God" (1:9) Now the purpose of the Christmas story for John was the "light" that shines in the darkness. Darkness is something most of us want to avoid, and we should. But at the same time, how do we appreciate the light if we fail to acknowledge the darkness? John addresses this darkness. John's Christmas story is a story about wondering what to do

when all the players have gone home. What we do when the shepherds go back to being shepherds, and the Angels back to singing with the Host of Heaven, and the Wise Men are back to their astrological charts. What we do after the tree comes down, we pack up the decorations, and eat the last of the cookies and get back to business as usual? Now we can hear the Christmas story from John.

We know what John is talking about with unemployment at 10%, the auto industry suffering, the housing market at a standstill, and the hopes and dreams of so many came crashing down last year. As we are beginning to pick up the pieces of our lives in the New Year, we know darkness. We know we are not invincible. We know we are vulnerable and again are reminded of how fragile life can be. It is easy to sing Silent Night and Joy to the World when everything is going our way, but when darkness enters our world, we need John. John's Christmas story addresses the darkness for what it is and gives us hope in the "Word that became flesh and dwells among us full of grace and truth." John refuses for the last word to be darkness, despair, or death. For God, in Christ was reconciling the world, you and me, to himself.

John's Christmas story, and the rest of John's Gospel, asks you to see this light as the one who came; "not to condemn the world (not to condemn you), but so that the world might be saved through him (that you might be saved). (John 3:17)

Not just saved from the fire, but saved from the darkness, the despair, and all that is anti-life.

One Lutheran Pastor wrote about an experience he had where he was in a cave with a group of people and the group leader asked how difficult it would be to get out of the dark cave without any light. Everyone responded it would be impossible, not to mention dangerous. The leader said if you are stuck in a cave without any light, your best bet would be to WAIT for someone else to enter the cave and find you. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth....He is the light that has come into the world....the darkness cannot overcome it."

For many of us, this is a challenge. It is a challenge to wait. Many of us would rather be going the wrong way than sitting and waiting for the light to come. The major challenges around New Year resolutions seem to be that we put all of our energy into making life different for ourselves, fighting against years of bad habits where the neurons of our brain are conditioned to acting a certain way. Someone jokingly said, you can make your resolutions at the New Year, and then give them up for Lent. In our New Year resolutions we all want to be more and different than we are. The problem is, most of us go at it alone. We use our will power, and believe we can turn on the light in the darkness of our lives alone.

John's Christmas story invites us to an alternate plan beholding the light,

the Word made flesh, coming into the world which no darkness can overcome. This Word, God, is full of grace and truth. God has all these gifts to give us, but has a hard time finding us at home. The truth God brings to your life is the gift of real love for you. He comes to you just as you are, but never leaves you where he finds you. John's Christmas story is not about where you have been, or where you are this morning, but what you are to become as a people who have received him, believed him, and are his children.

Howard Thurman wrote a poem about John's Christmas story. "When the song of the angels is stilled, when the stars in the sky are gone, when the kings and shepherds have found their way home, the world of Christmas is begun!" The work we do is to "Bold his glory." This is the beginning of the Christmas story for John, and for us. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

So, may we begin this New Year as Genesis and John, as the Word and the Word made flesh come together in Jesus, as a people who recognize him in the world full of grace and truth, as a people who receive and believe in his name as the children of God who behold his glory. For he is the Light that continues to reflect in the darkness of our world, which the darkness can never overcome.