

The Nativity of Our Lord - Christmas Day

December 25, 2017

Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church

Farmington, NM

John 1:1-18 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. 15 (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") 16 Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

"God's Christmas Message to You"

Merry Christmas! Those words mean something to you. Christmas tells you it's not just a day off of work and school. The name of the celebration is packed with more significance than just a nice greeting, warm wishes on a wintery day. Christmas is God's message to you. John chapter one shows us how God chooses to communicate with his people. And it's not just a letter in the mail or a video chat with relatives far away. God comes down to you in the person of Jesus. God gives you what you need in Jesus. God communicates the powerful news of salvation in Jesus.

God's Christmas message comes to us today from John chapter 1. The very first two verses of this account of the life and work of Jesus begin: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning."** (John 1:1,2) It's not until verse 14 that we catch the connection between Christmas and what John is introducing for us: **"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."** (John 1:14) Three verses later we finally run across the name Jesus Christ. (John 1:17) Interesting choice of a code name for Jesus. Titles and names for God always reveal to us a little bit about God, giving us just a glimpse

of God's infinitely complex nature. But this is definitely a curious choice. Especially given our culture's current carelessness with words.

Here's an example. Marist college published their list of most annoying words for 2017. For the ninth year in a row, "whatever" took the top spot (or bottom spot) for the most annoying word.¹ A new entrance "fake news" took up the second spot. Another understandably offensive phrase is "no offense, but..." And here's one that gets me scratching my head. "Literally" is used incorrectly so often that dictionaries now actually include the opposite meaning as one valid usage. That literally made my jaw hit the floor.

I can't help feeling like this is just the tip of the iceberg. We can twist words to make them mean whatever we want. Tragically, that means more than just minor annoyances. This year may go down in history as the time when we can just scream "fake news" when we read something we don't like. When people who are finally outed by victims just hide behind denials of their misdeeds. When the words they thought they could get away with, would just be shrugged off as boys being boys, finally come back to haunt them. Or will we continue to dismiss uncomfortable words as just your version of the truth, something you misunderstood or took out of context? I just don't remember those events the same way you do. If I did or said something that offended you or made you feel uncomfortable, then I'm sorry for how I made you feel.

Jesus gets the same treatment. If someone doesn't like what God's witness in the Bible says about Jesus, just say the Bible is making stuff up. Believing Jesus is anything more than a good teacher or great example is just your version of the truth. Giving Jesus top billing on December 25 can be dismissed as fake news. For our world and it's way of handling words, it makes it more challenging to see Jesus. It's tougher to fully appreciate the Word as God's priceless, timeless gift to the world.

One of the most heartbreaking scenes in all of history has to be Adam and Eve after they have eaten the forbidden fruit. I can't even imagine what that must have felt like for them. Their own words to God had become worthless. How devastating that must have been. To know absolute bliss with God and ruin it all. To enjoy perfect harmony with their Creator and then crumple it up like trash. To have God's Word and know God's promise and understand God's explicit instruction about how to show honor and worship by doing this one little thing for him, and then just disregarding it all and shattering everything God had given them. (Genesis 2:17)

Actually, I can imagine. I know what it's like to make a pledge and promise to the most important person in my life and then prove unfaithful by my own selfishness. No excuses. No explanations. Just broken promises. I know and you know what it's like to look at the loved ones who depend on us and treat our promises to them like they are disposable. We know what it's like to live in a world of pain and suffering, to appreciate the overflowing generosity and abundance from our God, and then look in the face of need and suffering and give the silent treatment. We know what it feels like to realize that keeping our word most

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/19/571868319/marist-college-releases-annual-list-of-annoying-words>

of the time, doing a pretty good job of following through on promises, doing an above average job on our performance is as useful to God as not even trying, never making the promise in the first place, not even making an attempt to stand behind our word. We know that sinking, inescapable feeling Adam and Eve must have experienced as they stood before God speechless. Nothing to say for ourselves. Any attempt at blaming anyone else and trying to pass the buck just adding insult to the injury we have already caused God. Our words to others and our lives to God are unreliable. And the worst part is we feel helpless to do anything about it.

Only the Incarnate Word provides what we need. John's poetic description of Jesus tells us he has been around since the beginning of time. Jesus is 100% divine with all the characteristics of God. And so Jesus could have chosen to continue hanging out in heaven while our world teeters unpredictably, hanging on unreliable human words. Jesus could have even orchestrated a movement from his heavenly throne. He could have simply waved his scepter to cause preachers and prophets, apostles and evangelists to give out the right information like a conductor directing an orchestra. Jesus could have set up a celestial command center to direct angel armies to help mortals get on track and provide those inflatable gutter ball printers to keep us on track when we start to wander and get distracted.

But Jesus didn't do that. Couldn't watch our mess. Chose not to keep his distance. Jesus, the Word had to come to earth and become human: **"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."** (John 1:14) The Word who called all of existence into being comes to our world as a tiny baby. The eternal Word doesn't just come to pay us a visit, like a manager checking up making sure subordinates are getting things right. Jesus saw the predicament of the world and did what no one else would ever volunteer to do. Jesus takes up residence and stays. Jesus steps into your story. When you can't be the hero of your own story, much less bail out anyone else, Jesus comes for you. God in the flesh comes to take your place. Jesus steps into the path of God's righteous wrath. He absorbs the punishment for every broken promise and carelessly spoken word. Jesus takes on himself all your inaction and inattentiveness to human pain and suffering around you. Jesus suffers for your flat out lies and half-truths. Jesus is executed for all the ruin and wreckage you have created. Jesus had to come to earth. He did it for you. He came to save you.

Sometimes I struggle with what the Bible says. At least how God chose to communicate to us. Why didn't God just stick with the basic when he wanted to tell us about Jesus? Why would he choose to talk about Jesus as the Word, when it feels like we need some secret decoder ring to figure it all out? Sometimes in life the things that more work are the most rewarding. Sometimes God packs deep, profound meaning into simple words. And when we don't give up at the first sign of a challenge, we get an amazing reward.

The Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, becoming human for us means something. It means God is communicating to us the grace and truth no one else would even dare to offer. Jesus is so full of grace that he can give it to you. Jesus can take on human flesh to give you the beautiful, sobering picture of grace at the cross. The Word comes to announce undeserved love for sinners.

There was a time when words actually meant something. The saying “My word is my bond,” comes from the 1923 Coat of Arms mounted on the wall of the London Stock Exchange.² This saying defined the terms and conditions for an industry run without any exchange of documents or written contracts. A word spoken was as good as accomplished. Giving someone your word would be enough to cement the deal. And the other person, the party on the other side of the deal just accepted that word and trusted in the person who spoke the word.

Can you imagine that happening today? Would you ever sell your vehicle without all the proper paperwork in order? Just someone giving you their word they would give you the payment you are asking for? Would you ever work for someone who didn't give you a contract? If you didn't have a legally-binding piece of paper that stated the terms of your employment, outlined the scope of your job and specified the amount you would get paid - would you even consider working for that person? But then the Word changes definitions. The Word means God bridges the gap for you. God does for you what you can't do so you can have a relationship with him. God gives his best. God gives his Son. God gives him up so he can have you. So you can have God.

In our world of shifting meanings, the Word become flesh means God stands behind his promises. All his promises are kept in Jesus Christ. In a world where nothing seems trustworthy or reliable, God stands behind the Word. The one who created land and sea now stands behind his promise of rebirth in the water and word of Baptism. His Word says you are his child. The one who spoke every living thing into existence now stands behind bread and wine and says “My body, my blood, given for you.” The one who said “Let there be light” now provides illumination for this dark world in his holy Scriptures.

The Word is your life. Jesus gives you something more than one religious option among many. Jesus is your truth and Jesus is your life. Jesus is yours to keep and hold and cherish. For those who are longing to reconnect with God, Jesus is your Word. For those looking for something solid and reliable and trustworthy, Jesus is that message. For those who are yearning to refresh themselves from all the craziness of worthless words and meaningless messages, Jesus is the Truth. Merry Christmas! Jesus is God's Christmas message to you. Amen.

² Davis, Heather Coate and Leann Luchinger. Loaded Words. Icktank Press: 2014, p. 12.