

Sermon for December 25, 2017 – Christmas Day

John 1:1-3,14,16-17 (EHV)

Theme: Baby Jesus is . . .

- 1) God in the Flesh.
- 2) Grace personified.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made. . . <sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>16</sup>For out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

When I was a child, my Mom would often give me a knitted sweater for Christmas. At the time, I wasn't a big fan of that kind of gift. Why? Because I never saw the point. It's just clothing, and you can't really play with clothing.

It wasn't until I reached adulthood that I really understood how precious my Mom's sweaters actually were. They took a long time to make. They kept me warm and healthy. They were made with the greatest love. I wish I could go back in time and smack some sense into childhood-me, because I now realize that those hand-knitted sweaters were truly some of the best gifts I ever received.

The unbelieving world views God's gift of Christ at Christmas much like childhood-me viewed sweaters: it doesn't see the point. A recent survey reveal that most Americans do not believe the religious component of celebrating the holidays is all that important – and that it wouldn't impact their celebrations much if it was removed completely.

Mature Christians, on the other hand, know that there can't be Christmas without Christ. The more time they spend thinking about who Jesus is and what he came to do, the more they appreciate the amazing love God has for us. It's only then that we understand that all the cookies, trees, decorations and presents can not even come close to giving us the lasting joy that God offers us through the Christmas Gospel of His Son.

Let us, therefore, celebrate Christmas by considering the awesome meaning of God's great gift to mankind, under the theme: **Baby Jesus is . . .** 1) God in the flesh. 2) Grace personified.

Part One: Baby Jesus is God in the flesh.

Before we dig into our text, we should address why it was written. The great apostle John wrote his Gospel last of all – in response to some false teachings that claimed that Jesus was only a creation of God, and not God himself. These false teachings inevitably placed salvation back into our hands – making it something we gain only through our own works.

John, however, was a first-hand witness to who Jesus was and what he came to do. It seems, therefore, that John wrote his Gospel to supplement the other three. Concerning his Gospel, John himself tells us: *these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* (John 20:31 NIV84)

Our text begins: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

Before we go on, have you ever stopped to consider why John calls Jesus: “the Word”? Well, what are words? They are the most important way humans communicate with each other – especially when it comes to passing on abstract concepts that can’t be felt, seen or heard with the senses.

In calling Jesus the Word, the apostle John is telling us that Jesus is the way God communicates himself to us. There is no other way that we can get to know God except through Jesus. And why not? Because God is so righteous and we are so sinful that he must communicate with us through an intermediary, in whom *all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.* (Colossians 2:9 NIV84)

Jesus is the revelation of God. To know him is to know the LORD – as John continues: <sup>2</sup>*He was with God in the beginning.* - That is to say, he was with the other members of the Trinity: the Father and the Holy Spirit; and - <sup>3</sup>*Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made.* . . . <sup>14</sup>*The Word became flesh and dwelled among us.*

Who is Mary’s baby – the one lying so defenseless and needy in a manger? It is none other than the LORD himself – the creator and sustainer of all things. What a paradox: He who feeds everyone and everything in creation, himself fusses to be fed. He who controls all things, cannot keep his arms from flailing and needs to be swaddled. He who carries all, himself needs to be carried.

The Word (the revelation of God himself) became flesh, that is to say he became exactly like us: subject to the same emotions, temptations, discomforts, and limitations we face as humans. At the same time, even though he was in every way like us, he still retained his divinity – continuing to rule over all things. This is the child Mary bore. This is God’s gift to fallen mankind.

Why don’t some people find celebrating Christ at Christmas all that important? I believe that part of the reason is they fail to understand exactly who Jesus is. Many people think that He was just a man – a mere teacher of morality and enlightenment, not any different than Gandhi, Muhammed or Buddha. Because they view him in this way, they don’t understand his importance. They don’t appreciate that Jesus is the greatest gift they could ever receive.

Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, I thank God that He opened your eyes to the truth about Jesus: that he is God in the flesh. Why? Because you see the true value of God's great Christmas gift: he is grace personified – as the Apostle John explains:

Part Two: Baby Jesus is Grace personified.

*We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>16</sup> For out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

As a disciple, John experienced Jesus' glory first hand. Not only did he witness Jesus' many miracles – including seeing him transfigured into his divine glory right before his very eyes; John also experienced Jesus' greater, hidden glory: his grace the expressed in way he suffered and served others.

You see, Jesus was unlike any religious teacher that has ever or will ever live. In what way? All earthly religious teachers will tell you how to live a good life so as to earn favor with God and men. Jesus, on the other hand, did not just teach morality. No, he taught repentance: that we should confess all our sinfulness and evil to God – trusting in his mercy to forgive. And why would God forgive us? Because Jesus came to earn the righteousness we need to stand before God. He lived the perfect life of obedience to God's commandments that we all failed to live. He took our sins upon himself and went to the cross in order to suffer the just punishment those sins had earned. For our sake he was forsaken by God and died. For our sake he rose from the dead – proving beyond any shadow of a doubt that our sins are forgiven. Jesus reconciled us to God so that, whoever looks to the LORD in repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sin, will not perish, but have eternal life.

Yes, Jesus truly is grace – that is to say, he his God's gift of underserved love personified. With him there is no striving or trying to earn favor. No, he bids us to do just the opposite: to give up relying on ourselves and simply trust in him and his work for the forgiveness of sin.

And Jesus' grace doesn't stop there, either. Jesus also reveals God's underserved love to us by providing our daily bread. He protects us from all harm and danger. The Scriptures say that he continually intercedes to the Father on our behalf, and rules over all creation for the eternal benefit of his Church. True, there may be times when we don't understand why the LORD allows certain trials and disasters in our life, but he promises to use even the evil we experience for our eternal benefit.

Yes, baby Jesus is the personification of God's grace – offering the forgiveness, life, peace and salvation that we all so desperately need.

But herein lies a sad truth about the gift of Jesus: because so many in our world are so quick to reject him – thinking that they don't need him – they miss out on the wonderful grace they so

desperately need. They miss out on the purpose, meaning and hope he brings to our lives. They miss out on learning what true love is: not just excusing every sinful lust and passion a person has, but God doing all he did to save us from sin, selfishness and shame so that we might live in true freedom. What freedom is that? The freedom to serve others because we already know that we have all that we need in Christ.

Yes, through faith in Christ, grace comes crashing upon us like waves on a seashore – one after the other – so much so that even when life takes a turn for the worse, we can suffer in hope – confident that *our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.* (2 Corinthians 4:17 NIV84)

Our world desperately needs the grace God offers us in Christ. This is why we, brothers and sisters in Christ, need to never stop telling people about Jesus – using every opportunity we can to explain to them why the Christ of Christmas is so important. Jesus is not just some take-it or leave-it holiday tradition that brings no true value to our celebrations. No, Jesus truly is the reason for the season. The holidays are pointless without him. Worse yet, they become a sham – looking to the faulty and failing “human spirit” for salvation instead of the LORD. Without Christ, the holidays will ultimately leave you depressed because, without Jesus, there is nothing to celebrate.

Thank God, then, that we truly have something to celebrate Christmas: Baby Jesus, who is God in the flesh. He is grace personified. May we never cease finding joy in these truths. May we never stop celebrating the Christ of Christmas. Amen.