

On this 2nd Sunday after Christmas, we are given a very different look at the Nativity...

John's "Christmas story" would be pretty difficult to do as a children's program.

- There is no Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem to be counted in a census... no baby found lying in a manger...
- There are no angels singing and proclaiming the good news of the Savior's birth... no shepherds tending their sheep...
- There is no star guiding wise men from the East...

Instead, there is "**the WORD**"—"In the beginning was **the WORD**, and **the WORD** was with God, and **the WORD** was God... in **the WORD** was life, and the life was the light of all people... And **the WORD** became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

You see, John isn't concerned about those details that ground Jesus' birth in human history. In his "Christmas story," John is making a *confession of faith*—about the very incarnation of God. Notice: this passage begins and ends by stressing that **the WORD** was and is God... and is intimately close to God. John knows that he is trying to "express the inexpressible"... to make language go beyond what is normally possible; but it is Jesus that makes him do it.

John uses this concept of "**the WORD**" to express his deep belief that in Jesus of Nazareth, he had seen and heard God; in the person of Jesus, he had come to know God... the One who is the perfect self-expression of God—**the WORD** that brings *LIFE* and *light* to all people.

John is saying that if you want to know who the true God is... look at Jesus.

If you want to know the thoughts / passions / desires of God—the very heart of God... look at Jesus.

"In the beginning," John writes... and for those familiar with the Bible, these first three words send us back to the start of Genesis... to the moments before creation, itself... when "*the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep.*" "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...*"

The creation story of Genesis 1 describes God as creating through **the WORD**—God SPOKE order into chaos... God SPOKE light into darkness... God SPOKE life into the void of the universe.

Now, in John's Gospel, we hear the same words: "*In the beginning...*" – and at once, we know that we are entering a place that is both familiar... and unknown. This is about a new creation... a new beginning... "*This is a new genesis...*" John is saying as clearly as he can.

Whatever else John is going to tell us, he wants us to see his book as the story of God and the world—not just the story of one character in one place and time.

This book—John's Gospel—is about the creator God acting in a new way within God's much-loved creation. It is about the way in which the long story (which began way back in Genesis) reached the climax in and through "**the WORD**" that "became flesh."

In Genesis 1, the climax is the creation of humans, made in God's own image... Now, in John 1, the climax is the arrival of a human being, who is **the WORD** become "flesh"...

The WORD becoming flesh and blood—this mystery that we celebrate each Christmas—is the decisive “event” in human history... in the history of all creation... because it changed everything! It changed God’s relationship with us. It changed our relationship with God – forever!

- **The WORD** that “*was God*” is now **the WORD** that “*became flesh.*”
- **The WORD** that “*was with God*” became **the WORD** that “*lived / dwelt with us.*”

John wants us to know / understand that the One we know as Jesus... is **the WORD** who was there from the very start—**the WORD** through whom all things were made... **the WORD** who brought (and still brings) light and life.

The WORD challenged the darkness before creation... and now Jesus, **the WORD** made flesh, challenges the darkness that is found within creation.

The WORD—Jesus—is bringing into being *a new creation*... in which God says, once more, “*Let there be light! Let there be life!*”

This *LIFE* that **the WORD** brings becomes the primary focus of John’s whole Gospel. How do I know? Just read through the Gospel of John, from beginning to end, and count the number of times the word *LIFE* appears. The contrast between the Gospels is striking. In John, *LIFE* appears 47 times... compared to only 6 in Matthew, 3 in Mark, and 5 in Luke. You could say that John’s Gospel is all about *LIFE*—the *LIFE* that comes only in and through Jesus, **the WORD** made flesh...

John tells us that Jesus, **the WORD**, comes that those who believe might “*have LIFE, and have it abundantly*” (10:10). And virtually every interaction in John’s Gospel is about *LIFE*...

- When Jesus encounters Nicodemus in the middle of the night, the conversation is about being born again... about new *LIFE* (3:1ff)
- When Jesus talks with the Samaritan woman at the well, he tells her of *LIVING* water that quenches all thirst (4:7ff)
- Jesus speaks of himself as *LIVING* bread from heaven... the bread that gives *LIFE* to the world (6:32ff)
- Jesus gives sight to a man blind from birth, and in so doing, restores him to *LIFE* in community (9:1ff)
- Jesus raises Lazarus from death to *LIFE* (11:11ff)... and Jesus, himself, dies to give *LIFE* to all people!

John tells us that the words Jesus speaks are *LIFE* as well (6:63).

We live in a world filled with “empty words” these days... words that hold little meaning / words that definitely do not give / nurture life. We live in a world that has become filled with conspiracy theories, “alternative facts”, “fake news”... a world where truth itself has become elusive (and openly contested)...

It can be hard to know who / what to believe anymore. If someone says, “*I give you my word...*” – can we believe / trust him? It depends, right?! It depends – on how well you know that person... how much experience you have with them... what you know of their integrity / character. Are they trustworthy? Can their word really be trusted? Sadly, in many cases, saying, “*I give you my word...*” simply is not enough—especially these days.

John reminds us, today, that long before “empty words” / conspiracy theories and “alternative facts” and contested truth and all the rest... God said, “*I give you my WORD*”... and it was enough! It was enough to bring *LIFE* and light... and grace and truth... to a world in a need...

I know, there are many people who would argue with this claim – that God’s WORD is enough. And more than a few would say that “God’s WORD made flesh” is a long-held conspiracy theory itself... since there is no way to “prove” it with irrefutable facts / data.

And yet, when we dig into God’s Word (scripture)... and read about God’s ongoing relationship with God’s people over time (God’s faithfulness through it all, regardless of how many questions were asked, commandments were broken, harsh words were spoken)... what shines through the words of those stories gives us reason to believe (trust) **the WORD** that comes from God... **the WORD** that *is* God... **the WORD** that became flesh—to reveal God not just to people’s minds (giving us an intellectual idea of who God is)... but to us, incarnational-ly / relationally... personally... to make us “children of God.”

Dear friends, when **the WORD** “*became flesh*” in Jesus... God spoke **the final perfect WORD**... and in so doing, God came to us in a new way. God did not stay distant or remote, separate or isolated from us. God entered into the very fabric of our broken, hurting world... into the darkness of the world—the world that God created and loves—NOT to condemn the world, but to redeem it (and us!) by dwelling with us.

God descended into the “every-day-ness” of our human experience... to live / dwell with us in the midst of our weakness, confusion, and pain. For you see, to become human is to know joy and pain, suffering and loss; it is to love and to grieve... it is to live and to die...

The “flesh” / “humanity” of Jesus is not just a costume he wore. He didn’t just pretend to be human. In him, **the WORD** really did enter into our flesh of weakness, mortality, and pain. *This* is the miracle of Christmas!

It is through entering into our flesh and blood that Jesus reveals to us who God is... has been... and always will be. It is through plunging deeply into the realities of our existence in this world that Jesus restores us to that for which he created us.

You see, God’s WORD to us today is full of promise.

- While there is much darkness in the world, the light of **the WORD** shines on—the darkness cannot understand... or overcome... or extinguish the light.
- The *LIFE* that was *in* God and *in* Jesus—**the WORD** made flesh—has now been given to the world... to each of us.
- Through the WORD made flesh, we, who are flesh, see what it means to be / live into our identity as “children of God”
- The light that shines in the darkness—the light that darkness did not / cannot overcome—has come to us so that we can shine in turn.

In baptism, we have received the “light of *LIFE*”...we have become children of light! In baptism, we have been given new *LIFE*—united with **the WORD** who is the source of light and *LIFE*.

And when we gather for worship—in person and/or online—Jesus, **the WORD**, continues to come to us—in scripture and proclamation... and in wine and bread—to give us *LIFE*... to nurture and sustain us... so we can reflect the light that has been given to us... the light that the darkness of the world cannot overcome.

In this season of Christmas and throughout the year ahead, may **the WORD** that became flesh and dwells with us... show us the Father’s heart... and bring us *LIFE* in abundance. And may we reflect, for all to see, the love and light of **the WORD** who is “*the light of the world*”—**God’s perfect WORD**... Jesus.

Amen.