

John 1:1-18
January 3, 2016

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

It would seem for many Christmas has come and gone. Once the gifts are unwrapped, the Christmas ham has been served, and the 24-hour marathon of “A Christmas Story” or “It’s a Wonderful Life” has ended, in many a home across the country the Christmas decorations start to come down, the trees boxed up or disposed of, and the lights, too, go out and our houses and streets seemingly fade back to normal. The “newness” of the gifts fade away and the rush of “New Year” festivities and college football bowl games is upon us. Even the shelves in the stores slash prices on the Christmas decorations to quickly clear them out making room for Valentine’s Day treats, which, if you have not noticed are indeed already on display. Christmas for many has come and gone and for much of society not another thought will be given to it until 10 months from now. We would like to think this is not the case for the church; however, we know many fall into this same trap. While our gospel reading last week thrust us ahead a number of years in Jesus’ life today I am glad we return to the beginning of John.

While John doesn’t give us the stories of Christmas we are so familiar with such as the angel’s appearance to Mary alerting her to the fact she will conceive and bear a Son or the Nativity scene so fresh in our minds from Christmas Eve; nonetheless, John

does present us with the story of Christmas – just in an altogether different approach. We shouldn't be at all surprised because John takes a different approach in his gospel nearly every step of the way as compared to the other three. Our lectionary, in giving us these first eighteen verses of John, isn't as quick as our culture to put Christmas in the rearview mirror and head on to the next big thing. Thank goodness, because neither should the church. Christmas is paramount to everything else that comes next in the life of our faith. Without Christmas, what would we have? Yet, how often do we really stop and ponder, like Mary, exactly what this day brings? How does it affect our lives? Why is it still important so many years later?

It would appear John is perhaps struggling with some of those same questions and challenges. Writing to a community challenged every step of the way, struggling to secure their identity, being persecuted for believing in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and probably pondering if it all really is true, makes a difference, and is worth the pain, trials and tribulations, and does the "light" really still shine in the midst of a dark and ugly world – John pens his letter to answer some of these questions and reassure the believing community that Christmas matters. Jesus was not simply a mortal human being who drew close to God and became more "spiritually" blessed than others as many believed and taught. If that were the case, then indeed Christmas didn't really carry with it any significance for the lives of the faithful. How then did Jesus enter into their current state of suffering and affliction?

What difference did it make to cling to belief in Him? How did their relationship with Him help them and see them through all that was going on in their lives, in their community, and in the world?

John opens his gospel by recalling the very first book of the Bible. He takes his community back to the beginning – to where God started – with the creation of the cosmos – the world and all things living. He takes us back to the creation of the light. He takes us back to the power of God to create good out of the chaotic primordial waters. And he gives us these opening five verses:

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

John stresses the theological significance of what happened that first Christmas and why it is so important each and every day of our lives. Why it is so important today, not only to us as Christians, but also to the world in which we live. This child born of Mary was not simply a babe born of flesh and blood thousands of years after the waters were parted, the stars set in the sky, plants and creatures of land, sea, and sky brought to life through the goodness of their Creator, and finally humans beings created by a loving God. No, Jesus was there from the very beginning. Jesus was preexistent with God throughout all of eternity. And it wasn't only that but it was also the fact that the Word made flesh was none other than God. This Christ child was more than a mere babe in a

manger who grew to become so wise and spiritual and beholden by God His creator. No, this Christ child was the very essence of God. This was God who was creating a new beginning. This was God become flesh and living among God's people as John states in verse 14 or perhaps even a more poignant translation is found in *The Message* version of the Bible, which states, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." God entered humanity, the world, in a new way. God wasn't absent. God wasn't simply some abstract figure in a galaxy far way; but, rather God was present – God moved into the neighborhood and came to all who were in that neighborhood and lived among and experienced all that was going on in that neighborhood.

This is why Christmas matters – each and every day of our lives. This is why we must cling to the promise found in that manger throughout the entire year – each and every day even when society moves on and the almighty dollar gives way to whatever else is next to profit from. This day is our hope. While we struggle mightily to comprehend it and clearly many of the religious leaders and rulers of Jesus' day didn't comprehend it either; for if they did, they would not have crucified Him. I suspect at times each and every one of us questions and wonders why the almighty and powerful God would choose in this manner and fashion to enter the world and bring upon God self the suffering and shame of the cross through the goodness and love outpoured through Jesus Christ for all. "We can't understand it. But when we suffer or confront

the tragedies of this life, knowing that God has come down to suffer with us, it makes a difference.”ⁱ

In this New Year, let us remember always the promise that God loves this often crazy, chaotic, and dark world we live in so much. Let us remember God loves the goodness of humanity God created so much that God entered into our very being, our very existence, and moved into our neighborhood. The Light is very much alive and present and is not exhausted when all the twinkling lights are removed shortly after Christmas Day. This Light is with us – here now together as we worship, sing, pray, share the peace, and are invited to His table to partake of His unending love given for each of us. This Light is with us as we depart even when at times it seems so dark. Yet, that Light is there and that Light matters. Let that Light shine in us so that we can be light to others. Let that Light come to us in our darkest of times. Let us place our trust, hope, and confidence always in that Light whom dwells in our neighborhood, alongside us, with us, and makes all the difference each and every day!

ⁱ William H. Willimon, Pulpit Resource Classic, Vol. 44, No 1, Year C; Logos Productions Inc.