

John 1:1-18
Christmas 2
January 3, 2020

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

It was Christmas Eve 2008 and as the intern pastor I was ready for that first time to preach and lead worship on one of the most special times of worship in the life of a Christian community. The final “i’s” were dotted and “t’s” crossed on the sermon. This was one of those long-awaited moments after two years of seminary instruction. I could not wait to be with the people of God and celebrate the joyous birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Yet, as life so often does, a curve ball was thrown our way. A winter storm set in and brought just enough snow and ice to make the 30-mile drive from Dubuque (we continued to live at Seminary that year of internship so Amanda could continue to teach) to Andrew and Spragueville in Jackson county treacherous. After phone calls with the council president of both congregations, the decision was made to cancel services. We were all disappointed.

As the sun set, the darkness of the night settled in, there was a part of me that felt so empty inside. A feeling I had let down those dear people I had grown to love in my short time with them. My hope for that night had been dashed. It was the first time in my life I had not experienced a Christmas Eve amongst fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. As minutes passed into hours, my soul ached and initially it felt as if all was lost. Gone was the music. Gone were the candles. This Christmas would be different than any other.

Yet, as I sat there with my family. As we read the gospel passage from Luke and listened to a rendition of Silent Night from a CD, I began to realize all was not lost. The hope of Christmas was still there. The light continued to shine. The presence of the Word made flesh was not absent. I just did not initially see it. But there he was. In those council presidents concern for my well-being. In their gracious words my soul needed to hear. In the word of God, we read together as a family.

In the love we shared. In the music that played. In the stillness of the night. It was different but make no doubt about God dwelt among us.

John gets right to the theological thrust of what God has done in Jesus Christ. There are no angels, no shepherds, no manger...nothing that we expect to find in the Christmas story. It seems John is not concerned about all that. At first glance, we may not see it. Yet, it is there. John just tells it in a different way. The heart of Christmas is not to be missed in John's proclamation of the good news of great joy.

"The Word became flesh and lived among us." (v.14, NRSV) Or, as the New Living Translation (NLT) puts it, "The Word became human and made his home among us." Or, *The Message* translation, which states, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." There it is. The Christmas miracle right before our very eyes. Jesus Christ is the Word, who was with God at the dawn of creation. Yet, as John makes it crystal clear, the Word is God. God taking on human flesh and coming to be with humanity in a new way. Yet, this is not just a mere visit. No, the Word dwelt among us. He made his home with us. He moved into the neighborhood. He pitched his tent, which could be another translation.

As Pastor and Professor Karoline Lewis puts it:

This (i.e., the Word becoming flesh and living among us) is as much about who God is, what God is about, and to what and whom God is committed as it is a decoration about the Word itself. The fourth evangelist understands that God's promise to be with God's people wherever they go now has taken on a different representation in Jesus. The dwelling of God is a deeply intimate, personal claim and assumes God's commitment to and continuity with God's people. Moreover, in the Word made flesh and dwelling among us, no God not only goes where God's people go, but is who they are. That is, God now dwells with us by taking on our form, our humanity. This "different" dwelling of God is God being where God's people are, and now *who* God's people are.¹

While Christmas is but a fleeting image in the rearview of many. Retailers are onto Valentine's Day and Easter candy and decorations on the shelves are not far off. The presents are unwrapped. Trees boxed up or set upon curbside to be hauled away. Lights are beginning to come down and the outside of many homes will once again be wrapped in the darkness of the night. This may be the second and last Sunday of Christmas in the church calendar, but our celebration is not over. For we have seen the glory of God and just as John was sent by God to testify to the light, so are we. For the church, those who confess the Word became flesh and lives among us, Christmas is just beginning as we respond to the grace upon grace we have in Jesus Christ. Grace revealed in his presence among us. Grace revealed in his love for the world. Grace revealed in the light he shines into our hearts. Grace revealed through his death and resurrection. Grace revealed in eternal salvation.

God resides with us. God abides in us. The true light has come into the world, who shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it. There have been many a dark day over this past year, but the light has continued to shine, even when we may not have seen it. Yes, things have been done in a different way. New ways we may never have imagined. Yet, the light of Christ has continued to shine through it all. The story of God's love. The good news of great joy! The story of the Word become flesh has continued to be proclaimed. Christ has been with us every step of the way. He has been our guiding light. He has held our hand. He has been at the bedside of those who were alone. His presence has been just as real through the gift of cell phones, cameras, computers, and TV screens. Indeed, he has dwelt among us. In some ways, perhaps the Word making "his home" among us has taken on new meaning in this time so many of us have transformed our residences to possibly include a space set aside to pray, worship, or dwell in the word of God.

We are a Christmas people living in the grace of God. We are a Christmas people who will continue to come and adore him, Christ the Lord! We are a Christmas people whose lives will reflect the light of Christ that dwells in us! We will come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!

¹ Karoline Lewis; "Commentary on John 1:[1-9], 10-18; www.workingpreacher.org.