

John 1:1-14

We are in Series B of the Church Year, which means that our Gospel readings are from St. Mark. But today we have before us, not St. Mark, but St. John. And that's because there is no Christmas story in Mark. Nothing at all is mentioned about the birth of Jesus. But St. John is not much better. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." That's it! That is John's entire Christmas story! It's kind of a let-down, isn't it? Where are Mary and Joseph, and the shepherds, and the angels singing? Where is the little town of Bethlehem and the manger? Matthew does not have all of these either, but at least he has the Wise Men with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. John has none of these things. No gifts, no nativity scene, nothing! Just, "And the Word became flesh."

Maybe when they put our pericope system together, they assumed that most people do not go to church on Christmas anyway; they go on Christmas Eve. And so they assigned Luke 2 - the more familiar Christmas narrative - for Christmas Eve, and John 1 for Christmas Day. That's one possibility. Another is that John wanted his readers to focus on the one thing about Christmas that makes it Christmas.

If you have Mary and Joseph, shepherds, angels, Wise Men, gifts, Bethlehem, and a manger, but no Jesus, you do not have Christmas. Christmas is Christ. It is God becoming man, or as St. John puts it, "the Word (becoming) flesh." If you have that, then you have Christmas, even if you have nothing else.

People talk about getting into the Christmas spirit. And so trees are decorated, lights are put up, goodies are baked, presents are bought and wrapped. We do these things and it's part of the way we celebrate Christmas. But Christmas does not depend upon these things. God becomes man for you even if you are not in the Christmas spirit. The Word becomes flesh even if you did not get the gifts you were wanting this year. Christmas comes not because our homes are ready, not even because our hearts are ready...Christmas comes because God's heart is ready--ready to give you the gift of His love.

And so, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," not because we were ready, waiting, and expecting such a thing. Love came down at Christmas at a time when we were loveless, at a time when we were unlovable, when we were busily engaged in doing all the wrong things. If God had waited until we were in the Christmas spirit to send His Son, Christmas would never have taken place. But God did not wait for us to change. He acted while we were living in darkness. He sent Christ to us while we were His enemies. "He came to His own," writes John, "and His own did not receive Him." It is, he writes, "the Light (shining) in the darkness."

If you have ever gone down into your basement in the dark and turned on the light, and in that instant bugs and creepy crawlers scurry away from the light into the dark corners, then you have an idea of what Christmas is really about. The Light came into our darkened world, into the darkness within our own hearts and lives, and we scurry away from that Light into those dark places where we hide with our secret sins. But that did not stop God from loving you. In fact, He loves you because you are loveless, because He loves the unlovable, because you and I so often live our lives in the dark. Christmas took place not to put a warm feeling in your gut, not to put you into the Christmas spirit..."the Word became flesh" so that He would go to the cross and die for you. And this is what John means when he adds the words, "And we have seen His glory."

The glory of Christmas is not what happened in the night sky over Bethlehem. The glory of Christmas was not when the Magi arrived with their gifts. The glory of Christmas is seen as the baby in the manger, thirty-three years later, hangs from a cross. Without the cross, Christmas would be meaningless. A God who is born is worthless to us unless that God dies our death.

And so Luke 2 does not really tell the entire Christmas story, but John does. "And the Word became flesh...and we have seen His glory." The manger and the cross together tell the story of Christmas. God was born to die. A baby in a manger may have brought you here to church this morning, but that baby, as a man dying on a cross, is what brings you to heaven.

And it does not matter if you are a member of this congregation, or a relative of a member, or a visitor here by yourself with no family connections at all. John's Christmas story is for you. Jesus, the Word of God, who is God, became flesh in a manger for you, and then, as a man, He suffered and died on a cross for you. This means you are forgiven no matter who you are. God is at peace with you in His heart because the Prince of Peace was born and died for you. Whatever wrongs you have done in your life, the Word became flesh so that He could be nailed to a cross and be punished for every one of those wrongs.

And so you do not need to live in darkness any more. You do not need to scurry away out of sight when the light of God's Word shines on you. You have a Savior. He is Light for you, not to blind you with His holiness and brightness, but to light the path of life for you; to show you that He Himself is that path; to let you live in the light; to put away the deeds of darkness from your life and live in peace, joy, and hope.

On this day 2,000 some years ago, the Word became flesh in a manger for every sinner. Today on this Christmas morning, that manger is here for you. This altar is the food trough - the manger upon which the "Word become flesh" is given to you in bread and wine. He is here in the manger not to receive our gifts, but to give you His; to give you forgiveness and peace with God, and confidence in the Day of Judgment; to give you Himself and all that He has. And so may you, as His gifts are given right now through His Word into your ears, and as He places His gifts into your very mouth, leave this place rejoicing that "the Word became flesh" for you, and you too, "have seen His glory." Merry Christmas! Amen.