

John 1:1, 14

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Dear children of the heavenly Light,

What is the meaning of Christmas? Depending on whom you ask, that question can have many different answers. Ask someone in retail, and it means the difference between a good year and a not so good year. Ask the average child, and it means presents, presents and more presents. Ask a non-Christian and you might get an answer that includes Santa or Rudolph or a snowman named Frosty.

What is the meaning of Christmas? Even for Christians, that question can have more than one answer. For some, Christmas is about peace, peace on earth and good will toward men. For others, Christmas is a time for giving. We exchange gifts to remember the greatest gift of all, the gift of a Savior. In recent years it has become popular to talk about Christmas as a day set aside for family. Perhaps you have heard in the news that some churches canceled their Christmas Day services to encourage people to spend time with the people they love.

What is the meaning of Christmas? The apostle John came up with his own answer to that question. And he shares it with us in the sermon text for today. His answer isn't very long. It isn't comprised of pages or paragraphs or even a few sentences. In fact, John would say that...

Sermon Theme: The Meaning Of Christmas Comes Down To A Single Word

- 1. A Word with no beginning and no end**
- 2. A Word who brought many years of waiting to an end**
- 3. A Word whose glorious reign will never end.**

How old are you? You might not like that question. At some point in your life you were probably told that it's not polite to ask that question. But you know the answer. To determine your age you simply count back to the date that is printed on your birth certificate. But what about Jesus? How would he answer that question? The Bible tells us that Jesus was twelve when he went to the temple (Luke 2:42) and about thirty years old when he began his public ministry (Luke 3:23), but it isn't that simple. John's words remind us that we can't trace Jesus' beginning to his birth in Bethlehem:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (v.1).

Before there was a Garden of Eden, before the six days of creation, before time began there was the Word. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. And the Word was God. Those words are so simple, but their meaning is profound. In a single verse John explains that Jesus is both eternal and divine. The divine attributes of Jesus. That sounds like a topic for a theology class, not a Christmas Day sermon. So why should we talk about them now? What do they have to do with Christmas? And you might even ask: “What do they have to do with me?”

Perhaps an illustration can be helpful. In the business world today, most employers are looking for education and experience. And it can be difficult to get a good job without both. You can graduate from school with a fantastic education, but at the end of an interview you still might hear the words: “I'm sorry, but we're looking for someone with more experience.” And even if you do have a few years under your belt,

it's not easy to advance your career without advanced degrees. Now imagine that there was a job posting for Savior of the world. Can you think of anyone more qualified than Jesus? Let's talk about his education. Jesus is omniscient. That means he knows everything. He knows how many hairs are on your head. He is the only one who knows when you've been bad or good. He knows what you want and he knows what you need.

Let's talk about his experience. Jesus is eternal. That means he has experienced everything. He has seen two world wars and a world-wide flood. He was there when the foundations of the world were laid. He was there to witness the first tick of time. He always was, always is and always will be. And because Jesus has no beginning and no end, he will always be with us. It is a great comfort for us to know that the babe of Bethlehem is not just a baby. He is true God. He is the eternal Son of God. And when the time had fully come, God sent his Son into our world. And when Jesus came, he brought many years of waiting to an end.

It is not until verse 14 that John clearly identifies the Word he spoke of in the first verse of his gospel: **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (14a)**. The Word is not a series of letters on a page. The Word is not a what, but a who. The Word has a name, and that name is Jesus. As we celebrate his birth today, we also marvel at the mystery of the incarnation which means that Jesus took on human flesh and blood. The Lord of heaven and earth became one of us. But before we can talk about how it happened, we need to understand why it happened.

Why did Jesus trade in his royal robes for swaddling clothes? Why did the Son of God become a human being? The answer, the only answer is love. God is love, and he showed us how much he loved us by giving us his Son. And when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he brought many years of waiting to an end. I'm sure that some of you are thinking that the waiting is finally over in your household. After twenty-five long days of December and all four purple and pink candles lit on the Advent wreath, Christmas is finally here. I'm sure that there a couple of people sitting here today who wondered if this day would ever come, but there was never really any doubt.

For New Testament Christians, for people like us, preparing for Jesus' birth is like reading a favorite book. We know the details. We know how the story ends. And no matter how many times we read it, it never gets old. But what about all those people who lived before B.C. gave way to A.D.? What about the Old Testament believers who never had a chance to read Luke 2? They had the promise. They held onto the promise. They trusted God's promise to send a Savior. And we can only imagine what it was like when the Lord brought thousands of years of watching and waiting to an end.

Imagine that you are among the shepherds who heard the angel's announcement: **“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11)**. Imagine that you are in the temple with Simeon as he holds salvation personified in his arms. Imagine that you are standing beside aged Anna as she at long last beholds the object of her fervent prayers with her own eyes. Now imagine that you are in heaven. You are standing among the throngs of saints. You are singing God's praises with angelic choirs. At the center of this celestial celebration is a golden throne. And seated on that throne is Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Word of God incarnate whose glorious reign will never end.

“We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (14b). When John wrote those words, he was speaking from personal experience. As one of Jesus' disciples, John had seen glimpses of God's glory. He saw Jesus change water into wine. He saw Jesus still a storm with a word. He was one of three disciples who witnessed Jesus' transfiguration. But John wasn't there when Jesus was born. And even if he had been there, he wouldn't have seen anything that could be described as glorious.

I think our nativity sets give us an unreal view of what it was like that first Christmas night. There is a quaint, little stable. There are few perfectly placed animals. Mary and Joseph are huddled around a manger that looks an awful lot like a cradle. It probably wasn't like that. Many people believe that the stable probably looked less like a barn and more like a cave. And if you have ever been around farm animals, you

know that the sights and sounds and smells are not exactly pleasant. A hole in the ground. Hardly the proper stage for the entrance of a king. A feeding trough. An unlikely place for any baby to be born, much less this one. But this was God's will. This was God's plan. Jesus was born in poverty, in humility. The manger, outwardly speaking, wasn't filled with glory, but it was full of grace and truth.

Grace and truth weren't on the list of the most popular Christmas gifts for 2009. I checked. I am guessing that grace and truth probably weren't on your Christmas wish lists either. But they were at the very top of God's list of gifts to give us. Where can we find them? Where can we find God's grace? We find it every time we read his Word. We find it at the baptismal font and the communion rail. We find it on an empty cross and in an empty tomb. And today we see God's grace in the form of a baby boy.

From the moment he came from the Father, from the day he was born, Jesus was full of grace and truth. In fact, Jesus called himself the Truth (John 14:6). The truth is that he came into this world to serve. The truth is that he came to give his life as a ransom for many. The truth is that Jesus came to destroy the devil's work. The truth is that our sins are forgiven. The truth is that we are God's children. The truth is that we will live forever in heaven. We look forward to that day, and we rejoice this day because the babe of Bethlehem is the King of Kings, and his glorious reign will never end.

Many stories have been told, many songs have been written, all trying to capture the essence of what this day is all about. But for the true meaning of Christmas we need look no further than John 1. This morning the apostle John reminds us that the meaning of Christmas comes down to a single word, JESUS. Amen.