

John 1:1-18  
The Incarnate Word  
WRCoB 12.19.21

Though the PA at the tackiest light display on River Rd  
Blares the Carol "Joy to the World"  
Many do not find joy during the holidays.

In fact, many find this time of year rather depressing.

To some, it may be due to the increase in darkness.  
December 21<sup>st</sup> being the shortest day of the year  
In the Northern Hemisphere.

SAD they call it, Seasonal Affective Disorder.  
Otherwise known as the winter blues.

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Others find themselves depressed this time of year  
Due to memories associated with past Christmases.

It may be due to the loss of a family member or loved one  
During the Christmas holiday.

A friend of mine who lost her son to suicide  
Shared these thoughts.

*"It is important to remember that not everyone is surrounded by large wonderful families. Some of us have problems during the holidays and sometimes are overcome with great sadness when we remember the loved ones who are not with us. And, many people have no one to spend these times with and are besieged by loneliness. We all need caring, loving thoughts right now . . ."*

For some, Christmas can be a very lonely time.

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Some people get depressed at Christmas  
Because they create such high expectations.

The biggest tree, the best decorations  
The most expensive gifts

Hours spent baking Christmas goodies  
And writing Christmas cards

The hype and hoopla  
The added stress and busyness  
Not to mention the financial strain

All done with the anticipated outcome  
This will be the biggest and the best Christmas ever.

When it's over, they feel let down.

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And this whole gift-giving thing can be a huge problem.

Listen to Dave Barry's comments on Christmas giving.

*Your standard man, at this point in the Christmas Season, has purchased zero gifts. He has not yet gotten around to purchasing an acceptable gift for his wife last Christmas.*

*He did give her something last year but he could tell by her reaction that she had not dreamed of getting an auto emergency kit, though it was a deluxe model with booster cables and an air compressor.*

*Clearly, this gift violated an important rule but the man had no idea what the rule was and his wife was too upset to tell him (washingtonpost.com).*

Even with the biggest “light displays” all around us  
And there are some fabulous ones in the area  
It seems many can’t find the “light” of Xmas.

Something is wrong.

Christmas has been consumed by commercialism.

Christ doesn’t sell but Santa Claus surely does.

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In 2017, Pew Research found that  
90% of Americans celebrate Christmas.

But only 46% consider it a religious holiday.

In other words

More than half of those who do celebrate Christmas  
Do so without acknowledging the birth event.

It has become a popular, cultural, nonreligious celebration  
With little or no recognition of its original meaning.

Judith, in her own survey, once made the remark  
That if everyone who decorated their homes  
Put up a Christmas tree and exchanged gifts

Would come to church to celebrate Christ’s birthday  
We’d experience the great hope and joy  
Found in Christmas.

Though we share the same God  
The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob  
With the Muslims and the Jews

Though we all consider Jesus a great prophet and teacher  
The similarities stop there.

For Christians believe in the Incarnate Word  
God becomes a person  
Immanuel, God-with-us.

It is a core Christian belief that  
Jesus descended from Heaven  
Was conceived through the Holy Spirit  
And birthed by a peasant girl named Mary.

Many find that too preposterous to believe.

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Hear this from the Quran, Islam's Holy Scriptures.

*Those who say: 'The Lord of Mercy has begotten a son,'  
preach a monstrous falsehood, at which the very heavens  
might crack, the earth break asunder, and the mountains  
crumble to dust ... that they should ascribe a son to the  
Merciful, when it does not become Him to beget one!*

No, it doesn't **become** the Lord of Mercy to **beget** a son.

It does seem rather outrageous, doesn't it?  
But it is our confession of faith.

It is a powerful message  
To think God would do such a thing out of love.

So powerful in fact, that the very idea  
So incredulous as it seems  
Has transformed billions of people  
Throughout the ages.

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Each of the four Gospels begins differently.

Mark's Gospel begins with  
John the Baptism and the adult Jesus' baptism.

Matthew and Luke begin their Gospels  
With differing accounts surrounding the birth of Jesus.

The Gospel of John, the Fourth Gospel  
The one which we read today  
Begins in a distinctly different way.

John goes all the way to the very cosmic beginning.

In his opening prologue  
John uses language similar  
To the beginning of Genesis.

John doesn't write it so much as a history lesson  
But rather more as poetic rendition.

In the beginning was the Word  
And the Word was with God  
And the Word was God.  
He was in the beginning with God.

John uses metaphors to speak truth concerning Jesus.

He is the Word but not just a word.

For the Greek word, *logos*, is not only a spoken word.

It carries the weight of God's creative power.

Britannica defines it as

*The divine reason implicit in the cosmos, ordering it and giving it form and meaning.*

John says that in Jesus was life  
And the life was the light of all people.

He was in the world  
And the world came into being through him  
Yet the world did not know him.

Again, as poetry is meant to do  
John's Prologue is meant to evoke imagery

To acknowledge the Word is far beyond  
The human capacity to grasp and understand.

This Word, then, that was at the very beginning  
That was with God that was God  
Does a very ungod-like thing

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

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What an incredible proclamation.

**This** is what we celebrate at Christmas  
This mystical, magical, miraculous Word incarnate

People over the centuries have thought a lot about this.

They have tried to figure out some rational explanation  
How God can become a person  
And still maintain his God-likeness.

That's not an easy thing to do.  
It all becomes rather complicated

Here is an attempt by the Chalcedonian Creed  
To explain how God in Jesus coexist.

*. . . our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body, of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union . . .*

It's a mouthful.

Rather than trying to explain the event  
I encourage us to let it be as it is . . .  
Something beyond our reasoning  
But not beyond our faith.

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I propose we look at it in a more simplified way.  
Let's do so with a quick word study.

This word, “lived” in verse 14 is an interesting study.

**14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us . . . .**

*More literally translated, the Greek verb eskenosen – ‘lived’ means that the Word pitched His tabernacle, or lived in His tent, amongst us.*

God became a human being and pitched his tent among us.

I like that!

Eugene’s Peterson’s “The Message”

Actually, comes closest to the original language.

**John 1:14 MSG The Word became flesh and blood,  
and moved into the neighborhood.**

There is something very missional

About the way this sentence reads.

It reminds me of the Church of the Brethren’s

Compelling Vision statement where it says,

*To live and share Jesus Christ*

*Through relationship-based neighborhood engagement.*

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God pitching his tent or tabernacle

Is reminiscent of an earlier time in the history of Israel.

God’s Word was written on stone tablets

Hauled down Mt Sinai by Moses.

The tablets were carried in the Arc of the Covenant  
And housed in a tent called a tabernacle.

It was believed that God was present  
In the most holy of holy places  
In the center of this tabernacle.

So, in much the same way, John is saying, this time  
The presence of God came in the flesh  
And pitched his tent among us.

That, my friends, I can wrap my head around!

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Bono, the lead singer for the band U2  
Attended a Christmas Eve service  
When the truth of the Incarnation hit him.

*The idea that God, if there is a force of Love and Logic in the universe, would seek to explain itself is amazing enough. That it would seek to explain itself by becoming a child born in poverty ... and straw, a child, I just thought, "Wow!" Just the poetry ...*

*I saw the genius of picking a particular point in time and deciding to turn on this ... Love needs to find a form, intimacy needs to be whispered ... Love has to become an action or something concrete. It would have to happen. There must be an incarnation. Love must be made flesh.*

Before the great Scottish theologians, T. F. Torrence  
Taught theology at a prestigious school in Edinburgh  
He served as a chaplain in WWII.

He shares of a day he ministered  
To a dying nineteen-year-old soldier.

The soldier in his final moments ask Torrance  
*Is God really like Jesus?"*

As he reflected later, he wrote

*This question captured "the deepest cry of the human heart"  
is the God that we'll meet on the other side of death the  
same God that came to earth as a lowly babe?*

Torrance assured the dying man with these words.

*"God is indeed really like Jesus. There is no unknown God  
behind the back of Jesus for us to fear. To see the Lord  
Jesus is to see the very face of God."*

God has spoken a word  
Of grace and truth to the entire world.

The Word Incarnate.

His name is Jesus.