

## **John 1:1-14**

### **Christmas Day, 2016**

There has been a wonderful buildup in our Christmas services over that last couple of weeks. It struck me as I sat watching our Nursery School children on stage at the front of the church nine days ago. They all had their cuteness on; dressed as sheep and cows, angels and shepherds and wise men ... and of course Mary and Joseph. They sang "Away in a Manger" and "In a Little Stable" and then they sang "Happy Birthday" to Jesus. And we prayed, the children smiled for pictures, and the parents clapped. Then we ate.

Last Sunday was our Sunday School Christmas Service and it took us to higher levels. There was musical talent on the keyboard, the cello, the guitar, and many wonderful voices singing praise to God. There was also more of the Bible's wonderful story of salvation. The children took us back to Genesis and talked about sin and death and the reason for Christmas in the first place. They talked about the promise that one day the seed of the woman would come and crush the serpent. They reminded us of the prophets who told about a Messiah who would come from the stump of Jesse, who would be born of a virgin, who would bring forgiveness and salvation. We listened again to Luke 2 and the story about the angels and the shepherds. We listened to Matthew 2 and the coming of the Wise Men. And together we praised God for His fulfilled promises and for His unending love for sinners. The children had battery powered candles and we sang "Silent Night". And we prayed, and we clapped, and we took pictures. Then we ate.

Last night we gathered here in the Lord's house once again. We rejoiced that Jesus, the light of the world has broken into our darkness, and we lit the Christ candle. We sang all the beloved Christmas hymns we could squeeze in. The choirs sang too, lullaby songs for the newborn King. We listened to Luke 2 and the song of the angels. We heard how the shepherds were "sore afraid" ... so afraid that it hurt. Like the shepherds, we started out the evening with fear in the face of the glory of God. We didn't understand what was about to happen, but the fear and doubt and confusion gave way to curiosity and we followed the shepherds to Bethlehem to see this thing that the angel had spoken about. As our excitement grew and we saw the infant child, we were filled with amazement and took on a new resolve to share that wonderful news in the days and weeks and months ahead. We heard a wonderful message about a loving God who sent His only Son, wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger. We heard good news of great joy that would be shared with all the people. Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord! We sang "Silent Night", this time with real candles. Then we all went home and ate!

And now, here we are, back again today. It's Christmas Day and today our aim is to dive into our subject matter even more deeply. The Nursery School children introduced the story for us. The Sunday School children gave us the details. Christmas Eve gave us the chance to see for ourselves and to take in the wonder of the birth of the Saviour. Now, this morning, we are going to leave behind the manger and the stable. We are going to leave behind the shepherds and the miscellaneous barnyard creatures and get into the heavy stuff, the serious stuff, the most important stuff. Today it's time to get to the solid food and no, I'm not talking turkey. I'm talking about the deep theological stuff that we need to chew on for a while.

Just how bad is the problem of sin that God would have to come himself in order to save us? This world was going to need a big hero, a really big Saviour. We were going to need someone with the right stuff! We were going to need someone big enough to cover the whole range from lowly shepherd to wise men and kings from the east but who among all the children of men would have the right stuff?

In Genesis 4, after Eve conceived and gave birth to Cain, she said, "I have gotten a man, the Lord." Eve understood the promise that one day there would come a descendant who would crush the serpent and she thought Cain was the one, but no. In Genesis 5, we hear about a man named Enoch, who walked with God. Could he be the one? No.

Genesis 6 ... Noah. He was a righteous man, but not the ultimate Saviour. Genesis 12 ... Abraham, or Isaac in Genesis 22, or Jacob. No, no and no. None of them had the right stuff. Among all the children of men, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Not Moses, not Joshua, not Elijah. Each of them did great things, but they could not be the Saviour. Each one of them needed their own Saviour. So just who is this baby, wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger? This morning John tells us who this baby really is. He also tells us about what He has come to do, and he sets out to explain just what that will mean for us and for our children.

When we prayed the collect for Christmas day, we didn't pray asking for a Saviour, because we have one. We prayed this way: "grant that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free from the bondage of sin." This little child, wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in the manger, is God's only-begotten Son. Let's be clear here. He is not merely the Son of God, He is God the Son. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. This eternal Word who was and is God took on human form. He became flesh in order to dwell among us. He became one of us so that He could in every way be tempted just as we are, yet without sin. He is the one upon whom the Lord has laid the iniquity, the sin of us all. We have the one of whom St. Paul says, "*God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*"

We have the one who is Immanuel, God with us. Again and again in the gospel of John, Jesus says things like, "I am the Good Shepherd" "I am the way, the truth and the life" "I am the bread of Life". And each time He uses a specific word that can only be understood as I am Yahweh ... I am Jehovah God.

This morning, before you go home and eat again and the turkey coma sets in, ask yourself, what do you need this Christmas time? God gives us light from above. Jesus brings the forgiveness for sins; purification for sins. He is the Lamb of God who carries away the sin of the world. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him we have forgiveness and life and salvation. God's gift this Christmas time is Immanuel, God with us. One of the gifts you have received in Christ is freedom from the bondage of sin. Sin and Satan no longer have absolute power over you to cripple you or hold you back. Through faith in Christ, you have a new nature and a new spiritual life. God's Spirit now lives in you. He is there to strengthen you up and enable you to live a life of praise to God.

In the opening to his Gospel, the apostle John wants us to see who this Jesus whose birth we celebrate really is. He is the eternal Word. He is the incarnation of the power that created and sustains the universe. He is the true, almighty, eternal God. My God is so great, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing my God cannot do. If He is the Word become flesh, the incarnation of the power that created all things, then we have been given a great blessing. He brings with Him the power to change our hearts from the inside. The good news of Christmas is that from the fullness of His grace we all received one blessing after another. Did you know that Christmas gifts only work if you use them? Some of God's gifts we like to use, we rejoice in them. But others get neglected. Are you ready to receive all that God wants to give you? Yes, Lord, I need forgiveness. Yes, Lord, I'm ready for peace in my heart and in my life.

But then there's that other gift. He wants to give us power to set us free from the bondage of sin. Do you want help being free from the bondage of sin? Or maybe you're thinking, 'I will open that one later, if that's ok.' Do you see the problem here? Too often there's still sin that we want to live in. There are things we don't want to give up or put behind us. We are of two hearts and two minds. Part of me wants to serve God, and part of me still wants to do its own thing. Part of me wants to follow Jesus and part of me wants to go its own way. If there is sin we still want to live in, have we really died to it? If there's still sin that want to keep, have we really repented?

One day a man came to Jesus and asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus started out His answer with another question: "What does the law say? How do you read it?" The man answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself."

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus said, “Do this and you will live.” But the man wanted to justify himself so he asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbour?” Did you ever wonder why He asked that question? He asked the question because he was looking for a loophole. He wanted to know who he didn’t have to love. That’s what a sinful heart is like; our sinful nature wants to know, “how much can I get away with?” Our sinful nature is lazy and wants to know, “what’s the least I can do?” Do you understand what is implied by “repentance”? Is it sorrow that what you have done has hurt God, or sorrow that you got caught and will now have to face the consequences? Real repentance, tears, and sorrow aren’t enough. There is also faith in the forgiveness of sins that God, in His grace sent Jesus to suffer and die for you, that you might be freed from the curse of the law and that you might stand covered in Jesus’ righteousness.

Oh, and there’s one more thing: For real repentance there is also born in us a willingness and desire to be changed from the inside out and by the new power that God has given us, to live in a way that is pleasing to God. God’s gift of a Saviour means that we have access to the power of the creator God to overcome sin and Satan. Real repentance is a change of heart, brought about by the power of God. That change of heart wants to lead us into a change of life. If our priorities have shifted, then we shouldn’t be doing all the same things we were doing before.

Do you hear yourself saying, “Yes, Lord, I want forgiveness and eternal life, and yes, I’m sorry for my sins, but for now Lord, I still want to drive. I still want to run my life my way, and not Your way. I will let You lead me, for now, but I reserve the right to take over if I see something I don’t like.” So, how should we live? Paul has the answer in 1 Thessalonians 5:16. He says, “*Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in every circumstance.*” Then he goes on to encourage us to live in the Spirit, to love the Word, to embrace what’s good and avoid what’s evil but how can we do that? We can do it as we access the power He brings to set us free from the slavery to sin.

When John the Baptist came, he didn’t just come preaching the bad news of sin and its consequences. He came preaching the good news. He came baptizing. Both of those things have the same effect. It is the Gospel, whether preached or poured that changes the heart. It is when the Gospel, preached or poured, has changed your heart that there can be a changed life. It is the power of God in His word and in your baptism that enables you to live a Christian life.

Dear friends, you have been given power to become children of God. It was the power of the Word now become flesh that brought forth all of creation. That same power has made you a child of God and an heir of heaven. From the fullness of God’s grace you have received one blessing after another. One of those blessings is the power to resist sin and overcome it and so we pray, “Grant that the birth of your only- begotten Son in the flesh may set us free from the bondage of sin.” Lord, help me this day live for You. Sanctify me. Make me more and more into the person you want me to be. Forgive me when I neglect Your sanctifying power and Lord, hasten the day when You will give me final deliverance from the bondage of sin. The day when You will rescue me from this body of death and call me home. Until then, help me make use of the blessed gift of a Saviour to set me free from the bondage of sin.