

The Word Became Flesh!

Isaiah 55:1-13, John 1:1-18 (ESV)

November 12, 2006

“In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God....The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it....And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Here we find hope, joy, and gospel. Here we find strength, comfort, and courage. Indeed, here we find love, peace, and life itself. For these three—Word, light, and flesh—address the silence, the darkness, and the loneliness of the world and of our lives. These three tell us the good news that in Jesus Christ God has spoken, God has triumphed, and God has reclaimed us as his very own.

First: “In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God.” Jesus Christ is the Word of God, the creating, sustaining, and self-revealing word of God, spoken from heaven into the world and into the silence of each of our lives. To say that Jesus is the Word of God is to affirm not only that God exists but also that God has spoken, that God has communicated with us, that God has told us what we need to hear, and that Jesus Christ is what God has to say to us. The silence of heaven has been broken! We have been given the word of life. The birth, life, teachings, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ

are God’s word to us, God’s message to us, God’s gospel and good news to us. The suffering love we see in Christ reveals God’s character and disposition toward us. The grace which Christ embodies brings about the forgiveness of our sin and gives us the courage and strength we need to resist sin and to go on living. Jesus Christ is the word of God, spoken from heaven into the silence of our lives.

This is good news for us, because part of life is silence—silence for days, months, or years, silence of the heart, silence from loved ones, even silence from heaven. Even in the midst of noise and confusion, we strain against the silence to hear the word we need to hear, a word of hope, a word of pardon, a word of acceptance, a word of love. We come to church in the hope that the silence will be broken. We need to hear the word of God in Jesus Christ. And we do.

So, now we are called upon to hear, believe, and obey this word of God. For us to do this, for us to live by the word of God, we need to read, hear, learn, believe, appropriate, and obey the word of God made known to us in the scriptures. I urge us all to immerse ourselves in the Bible, at church and at home. Read it. Hear it. Consume it. Drink deeply from this well. These are the words of life, the only words of life. Do we not all need to hear words of love, words of hope, words of

encouragement, caring and support? And only by hearing such words do we find the courage to speak such words into someone else's silence. Yes, part of life is silence, but God has spoken to us in Jesus, and the Bible is the record we have of that. Do not neglect it. Do not fail to hear his word. Do not fail to heed his voice. Do not fall prey to the terror of the silence.

Second: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Jesus Christ is the light of God shining into the darkness of this world, the darkness of our lives, and even the darkness of our hearts. Jesus Christ is a bright, powerful, shining light that has not been quenched, that will never fail us, and that will lead us home to God our Father. In him are both truth and life. In him we see the light of humility, love, grace, forgiveness, dignity, courage, and authenticity. In a world in which it sometimes seems that all of these are lost, it is refreshing and life-giving to see this light shine in Christ. Jesus Christ is the life-giving light of God shining into the darkness of the world and of our lives.

This is good news to us, because part of life is darkness—the darkness of fear and of the unknown, the darkness of evil, sin, and guilt, the darkness of hatred and confusion, the darkness of loss and death. The darkness of terrorism, war, crime, and poverty threaten us from the outside. From the inside, we all know the darkness of despair, loneliness, heartache, and the relentless gone wrongness of life. On good days we can keep the darkness pushed back out of sight. But on other days it rises up to threaten us and to attack all we hold dear. It reminds us of losses past and it makes our hearts ache for those losses yet to come. We come to church in the hope of dispelling the darkness. We need to see the light of God in Jesus Christ. And we do.

So, now we are called upon to see and to live in this light. Today's reading from John, chapter one, is, in effect, his Christmas reading. Still today we continue to proclaim and to celebrate the incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ, the true light of the world, shining more brightly than any sun or star, illuminating our lives, cheering our hearts, guiding our minds, giving us good hope, faith, and courage. For us to live by the true light of the world is to take what we hear in and from the Word of God and to apply it to our lives in the world. What good would the true light be to us if we closed our eyes, refused to see, and continued to stumble along our way? We are all here today, partly because we have seen the light of Jesus Christ, but also partly because we know that we still need the light. We need for our eyes to be opened farther so our hearts, souls, and minds can be filled with Christ. Only by the light of Christ do we know the saving grace of God, the healing forgiveness of God, the life-giving love of God, and the overflowing kindness of God.

By the way, it is no accident that we celebrate Christmas, the shining of the light of God into the world, at the beginning of winter, which is coming soon. When

the church first began to celebrate Christmas, early in the fourth century, it chose the beginning of winter. In A.D. 274, Emperor Aurelian had introduced to Rome the festival of the Birth of the Invincible Sun (s-u-n) on the winter solstice, which was then December 25. The church, challenging the beliefs, power, and authority of the Empire, decided to celebrate the birth of Christ at the same time, not because it was his birthday, but in order to go head to head with the Empire, using the culture's own holidays to subvert and to undermine the culture's pagan faith. While the Roman Empire worshiped the victory and the rebirth of the sun in the sky, the church rejoiced in the birth of the Son (s-o-n) of God, Jesus Christ. While the empire celebrated the return of more daylight, the church knew something far more important, the true light coming into the world. While the empire worshiped the powers of nature, the church worshiped the power of God who created nature. So now, at the beginning of winter, when the days are shortest and the nights are longest, at the darkest time of the year, we proclaim and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the true light of the world. The Roman Empire has come and gone. But the Christian church still celebrates Christmas.

We are also called upon to share the light with others. John was not the light, and none of us is the light. Only Jesus Christ is the true light. But at least we can reflect the light of Christ. At the very least, we strive not to obscure the light, not to hide the light, and not to deny the light. There are those around us who will either see the light of Christ reflected in our lives or never see it at all. So we want to reflect the light in our lives, in our homes, in our churches, in our schools, in our work places, and in all the world. When God's grace shines upon us, we reflect it in gratitude to God and graciousness toward others. When God's love shines upon us, we reflect it in worshiping God and in loving and serving neighbors. When God's truth shines upon us, we reflect it by a commitment to truth, seeking truth in our study of the Bible, being truthful in our dealings with others. Yes, part of life is darkness, but Jesus Christ is the light of God shining in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. We need not succumb to the terror of darkness.

Third: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Jesus Christ is the saving presence of God in the loneliness of the world and of our lives. We cannot see God. We cannot know God directly. But God has chosen for us to see Jesus Christ, and God has chosen for us to know him through Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth, the only son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father, and who has made him known. All we need to know about God, all we need to know for life and hope and salvation, is available to us in Jesus Christ. And he came into the world, as the only son from the Father, so that we may become children of God. The word of God, which created humanity, took on humanity and became human! Christ has become our only link between the Creator and the creatures. This one speaks the

truth about God and about us. This one forgives our sin. God who made us has come to be with us as one of us. Jesus Christ is the saving presence of God in the loneliness of the world and of our lives.

This is good news to us, because part of life is loneliness—some of it self-imposed exile, some of it broken relationships with fathers and mothers, wives and husbands, sons and daughters, friends and neighbors. More than these, there is a profound restlessness about our lives, a thrashing about from one concern to the next, because our relationship with God our Father has been broken, and our hearts will always be restless until they find their rest in God. We come to church in the hope that we will be saved from the loneliness. We need to know the presence of God in Jesus Christ. And we do.

So, now we are called upon to receive this gift, to know the presence of God in our lives. “To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” This is aimed at us, at all who hear this word read and preached today, at church, by way of live radio, and by way of recording. God yearns for us to hear the word, yearns for us to see the light, yearns for us to receive Jesus Christ, yearns for us to become believers, and yearns for us to join the community of those who follow Jesus Christ. We are here today partly because we have already believed, but partly because we can always be better followers of Jesus than we ever have been before. We are called upon and invited to live by the Word of God, to live by the light of the world, and to receive the Word which became flesh, and so to become children of God ourselves, members of the family of the people of God. Yes, part of life is loneliness, but to become a child of God is to receive the grace and truth of Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sin and the renewal of life. This is the goal. This is the purpose. This is the reason that God spoke, that the light shines in the world, and that the Word became flesh. We dare not pass this by. Do not yield to the terror of loneliness.

“In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God....The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it....And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Here we find hope, joy, and gospel. Here we find strength, comfort, and courage. Indeed, here we find love, peace, and life itself. For these three—Word, light, and flesh—address the silence, the darkness, and the loneliness of the world and of our lives. In Jesus Christ, God has spoken, God has triumphed, and God has reclaimed us as his very own.

To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

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5

© Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, Pastor
Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church
1627 Monument Avenue
Richmond, Virginia 23220
www.grace-covenant.org