



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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CHRISTMAS DAY, DECEMBER 25, 2019
ISAIAH 52:7-10; PSALM 98; HEBREWS 1:1-12; JOHN 1:1-14

BE ASTOUNDED

John 1:1-14 *[In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.]

Merry and blessed Christmas, everyone. It's Christmas morning! And we have so many lovely and familiar Christmas traditions...

When my own two children were youngsters, we had a little one-bedroom apartment, with no closet space to speak of. I would buy Christmas presents for them and put them in bags behind the couch and throw a blanket over them. I would then tell Patrick and Kelsey, "This pile is invisible." And they would not go near it and they would not peek

at it! I swear! It is a true miracle of Christmas, I know -- because I have friends who tell me that when they were kids they would search out like bloodhounds the Christmas presents their parents had bought and wrapped, and unwrap them to see what they were, and then rewrap them! None of you here, though, did anything like that, right?

Now, was the integrity of my invisible pile of Christmas gifts secure because I was such a tyrant, they didn't dare? I don't think so; I'm pretty soft. The kids would say they didn't *want* to look and see what was under that cloak of invisibility; they didn't want to already know and ruin the surprise and joy of what would be under the tree on Christmas morning.

And, friends, that is both the blessing and the challenge of welcoming the birth of Jesus on this Christmas morning.

Whether we read in Luke's Gospel the angel declaring: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger -- or if we have the more mystical Gospel of John we just heard: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory" -- we are coming face to face with an **astounding** miracle -- but one that we have long since peeked at under the blanket behind the couch.

Our familiarity with the Christmas story is both our blessing and our challenge. Blessing, of course, but with the familiarity, we think we know exactly what to expect, and whom to expect -- and so our breath is not taken away; our lives are not necessarily altered

today because of it. But Jesus was not just born into the World 2000 years ago, as a one and done. Jesus continues. Emmanuel, God WITH us, then, and NOW.

Christmas becomes so familiar; we could almost forget what a miracle of pure love it is! For also in John's gospel, we read, "God so loved the world that he sent his only son." What if we lived our lives in response to that kind of love? Do we really know exactly what to expect?

We have a God who came in our flesh, who knows our world and our sorrows, not from an ethereal cloud above, but from the straw of the manger, and the dirt of the road, and the wood of the cross -- from flesh to flesh, a mother's breast, a friend's embrace, a desperate person's hand reaching out.

That is where we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth. In the Gospels, certainly there are astounding moments, like at Jesus' baptism when a voice is heard from the heavens saying, "This is my beloved son in whom I take delight," or at the Transfiguration, where Jesus shined up on the mountain with Moses and Elijah. But most of Jesus' story takes place with everyday people -- because *that* is the real miracle: not that God shines -- of course God shines! -- but that God became flesh, one of us, truly human, on this Christmas day!

Think about what that means, and BE ASTOUNDED. When we hear “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” in this Gospel of John’s Christmas-morning story, we are hearing his declaration that in Jesus, we have the full revelation of God, fully divine and fully human. Don’t ever let the miracle of that become commonplace to you. We need that human Jesus among us – where he indeed IS.

The Canadian author and poet [Sarah Klassen](#) captures it in her poem *Incarnation*¹, that goes:

God is carnal? Yes! God
has got to be flesh and blood. Bones too
like any one of us. A child
can’t go to sleep in a dark room
unless someone is right there beside her.
Someone with some skin.

Embodiment matters. And in his birth, Jesus, coming as one of us, changed the world, and changes us, with the comfort of being flesh and blood, right here beside us.

Our challenge is to still be astounded by this miracle! We think know all about the Gospel story of Jesus’ birth – and that we don’t see Jesus in flesh and blood these days, not the same way as Christmas morning. Yet, as Christians, we DO, we MUST, see Jesus in flesh and blood, right here beside us, in every person. That is the challenge, too! Who is

Jesus for you – because no one ISN’T Jesus, according to his own words: *whatever you did for one of these, the least of my people, you did – or did not do – for me.* He made no exceptions.

Who is Jesus for the people in the SeaTac Detention Center and the refugee tent city in Matamoros, Mexico? For a stranger seeking asylum, and a busy working mother, and a stressed young man looking for a job, and a homeless family, or a lonely neighbor, or a person who’s grieving, or the one who’s sitting right beside you, right now? **You are.** And they are, themselves. That is the real mystery of the incarnation, and the real, tangible experience of the incarnation for us, two millennia later, who still come to the manger like the shepherds, looking with trembling and joy for Jesus.

Yes, people were expecting the Messiah to shine and conquer, not to be a helpless infant born on the run to a nondescript family. OUR ordinary flesh – and humble circumstances. *That* is a challenge. Is this the God we want? An ordinary birth to less-than-desirables as parents? Isn’t the American dream built on riches and fame and power at all costs? Then why do you come to the manger?

Imagine Jesus being born into the world TODAY. Being born at the borders, and in

your town, and your neighborhood, and your family. In YOU. This is the joy of Christmas morning that makes us gasp in wonder! Generation upon generation had waited for his coming. And now the star is shining in the East. Can we turn our eyes, as they did, to the sheer wonder of it? Let it take your breath

away – and send you forth to live the promise and the challenge of Christmas: Emanuel, God with us!

¹ Klassen, Sarah, *Incarnation*,
<https://www.christiancentury.org/artsculture/poems/incarnation-0>



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