

Written Copy: John 1:1-5, 14 “The LORD Who Came to Dwell with You” Christmas Eve (Christmas Day Celebrated)

Sunday, December 24th, 2023

Text: John 1:1-4, 14

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Exegetical Statement

The LORD presents Himself as the Word of God, the second person of the Trinity. He was with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit into eternity past before anything was created. This Word of God is the second person of the Trinity, God the Son who is the source of physical life for all things, the author of all that we call reality, and is the light of knowledge for all humanity as to who this Triune God is. He is the light of truth and sinlessness that the darkness of sin, death, and the devil could not extinguish. He is the source of spiritual life for all mankind. He is God who took on human flesh in order to dwell intimately with His fallen people. He set up His tent in the midst of our fallenness by taking on humanity and living amongst sinful and broken people. He came to be the atoning sacrifice that purifies all who believe in Him. Many didn't recognize Him and refused to believe in Him, but for those who did believe by faith He gives, He revealed to them who God is, as the Almighty and All-powerful God who desires to have an intimate relationship with us now and for eternity.

Focus Statement:

Jesus is God the Son, the Word made flesh who was there with the Father and the Spirit, who is the author of all created reality including you and me. Who, instead of giving up on His sinful creation came down and in the person of Jesus intimately joined Himself to it. He is God become man: truly divine and truly human, to be your atoning sacrifice. He comes to wash you clean from all your sin and declare you to be God's precious child. In Him we know God as the All-Mighty Creator who is our All-Loving Savior who wants a relationship with us now and for eternity.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Many have the wrong idea about Church and the God we worship seeing Him as judgmental (because we can be). That they need to clean up their lives and do good works before they can come. Or that there is nothing more special going on than a bunch of “Good Time Charlies” patting one another on the back.

What the hearer should do as a result:

See those around us, especially those we might consider to be unworthy, and those who God the Son took on human flesh to save, just as He did for me and for you.

Subject Sentence: The LORD took on flesh to dwell intimately with you.

Introduction: The Herdman Children in the Christmas Pageant

It was Christmas time at Our Savior Lutheran Church, located in a small town in the middle of Minnesota. And that meant it was time for the Sunday School teacher to go out, round up, and recruit children to be in the Children's Christmas pageant. She made the usual phone calls and stopped at the usual homes of all the children she had come to rely on to be in the Christmas pageant year after year. And in that town, it meant recruiting almost all the children available. Almost all, except for the Herdman Children.

The Herdman's were one of those families that lived on the "wrong side of the tracks". Mom and Dad smoked and drank, often to excess. And their children were known to be problem children. They often wore dirty clothes to school. The older ones smoked cigarettes pilfered from Mom's dresser. They knew plenty of cuss words, which they learned from hearing Mom and Dad quarrel. These were not the kind of kids one would want for a Christmas Pageant that displayed the beauty and the wonder of Baby Jesus' birth.

And in past years the Sunday School teacher didn't have to worry about them participating. They never attended Church and made fun of and bullied those other children at school that did. Things remained that way until one of them found out that Our Savior offered donuts to all the kids that came to Christmas Pageant practice, and that on the Sunday after the Pageant was over, breakfast was served.

And so it was when the day came for the first practice along with the usual kids who showed up, here came the six Herdman children. The quick-thinking Sunday School teacher planned on giving all six non-speaking shepherd parts. But the Herdman children wanted to be the center of attention. So, behind the Sunday School teacher's back, between the first and second practice, they bullied the children she picked to be Mary and Joseph, the three Wise Men, and the lead shepherd who had lines to recite. She had no choice to replace these important roles with the Herdman children who had no idea what the Christmas story was about.

The Sunday School teacher was afraid that this development would ruin the beautiful Christmas Pageant. She had no idea how appropriate these children would be to tell the story of Jesus' birth. Jesus is the God who came for them, too. The LORD has a history of picking and coming to those who do not know Him and are not worthy of Him.

The LORD Comes to Dwell Among His Sinful People

In our Midweek Advent Sermon Series, we talked about people in the Old Testament whom the LORD came to establish a relationship with who were unworthy.

There was Abraham and Sarah, who had been called by the LORD when they were unbelievers. He promised them that they would be father and mother to a mighty nation, and the all the world would be blessed from them. But they were old; Abrham 100 yrs. old and Sarah 90 yrs. old. They had been trying for so many years to have children, with no success. They couldn't believe that what God promised could come true. So, Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands and he had a child with Sarah's Egyptian slave. They doubted the LORD's power. They had put him in a box. But the LORD came down and visited them, taking on a human form to be in their midst, and to personally promise them that by this time next year, Sarah would have a child by Abraham. And it happened just as He promised.

Years later Abraham's grandson Jacob was on the run from his brother, whose birthright he stole. When he stops for the night, the LORD comes to him in a vision with a ladder that stretches from earth to heaven. At the top is the LORD Himself who promises He will be with and watch over Jacob, and that he will be the father of a great nation. And then later on, just before he must confront his brother Esau, the LORD takes on human form and wrestles with him, encouraging him to wrestle with all the problems of life because He, the LORD God, is with him and will bless him.

Jacob goes on to father 12 sons whose descendants become the nation of Israel. These sons are not always faithful. In fact, they were going to murder their brother Joseph before deciding to sell him into slavery. When a famine hits the land, the 11 brothers head down to Egypt. They find brother Joseph is the 2nd in command of the whole nation. The LORD was with him and put him there to care for his 11 brothers and their families. He forgives his brothers and gives them a place to live and grow and prosper. And they do so.

But when they become too numerous the Egyptians enslaved them for 400 years. During this time, they lost their faith in the LORD and His promises given to forefather Abraham. But the LORD Himself comes; His glorious presence cloaked in a bush that is on fire yet is not being consumed. He comes to Moses, a fugitive on the run from Pharaoh for killing an Egyptian. The LORD comes to Him really and truly present to call this fugitive to be His man in the mission to save His faithless people from slavery and guide them to the land promised their forefathers. And He does just that.

They wander in the Wilderness for 40 years, which is their punishment for being unfaithful to God's command to enter the Promised Land, and for and worshipping the Golden Calf. But the LORD does not abandon them as they deserve. He comes to be with them and travels with them. He designs a moveable worship place, the tent called the Tabernacle, which is set up wherever they camp, taken down when they move, and set it back up again when they reach their new campsite. In this Tabernacle the LORD sets up the tent of His presence to be really and truly present among His sinful people. He is separated from them, His real presence cloaked inside the most inner sanctum of the Holy of Holies above the Ark of the Covenant. He does this so He can be really and truly present with them, without destroying them, since sinful man cannot exist in the holy presence of the LORD God.

In Jesus Christ: The LORD Comes to Dwell Intimately with Us

The LORD is the God who desires to dwell intimately with His fallen Creation. And that is the reason for this baby who was born on Christmas and laid in a manger.

The Apostle John tells us who this child really is. He is a human baby, but not just any human baby, this is the Word of God, who spoke all things into existence in the beginning. This is God the Son who existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit from eternity past and will exist into eternity to come. This is the very author and creator of all we know as reality. He is the Almighty God that is beyond our knowing and understanding, who knows the mysteries of the infinite universe and of the deepest parts of the ocean because He created them all. He is the source of all life, with knowledge about our bodies and our minds beyond what any doctor, scientist, or psychologist could ever fathom. He created mankind to live a sinless perfect life, and then watched generation after generation spoil it by turning away from Him and turning to sin.

But He is the LORD God who doesn't turn away from sinful man. Instead, He came down to earth. God the Son is the Word made flesh. He came to be God so intimately joined with humanity that He could be the light of revelation for all men to know who our unknowable God is. He came so that you might know Him. He came not to live apart from sinful mankind, not to be shuttered behind a curtain in the tabernacle. He is God who intimately joined Himself with humanity to live among us. To set up the tent that is His human body. To be fully God and yet fully man born as a baby in the humblest of circumstances, to the humblest of people. He came to show us that God gets us, all of us.

Show Video Clip of The Birth: Jesus Gets Us, All of Us

Jesus is the divine and sinless God who refused to abandon His sinful creation but instead came to set up His tent and dwell among His sinful creation. He came as a small helpless baby, who was born without sin, yet surrounded by sinfulness. He grew to be a man who walked the roads of Palestine with 12 men who were filled with sin. They fought about who was the greatest, wanted to call fire from heaven down upon a town that rejected them, one of them promised to stand by Him no matter what then denied Him three times, another sold Him out to His enemies for the going price of a slave. Yet these are the men He came to set up His camp with, to teach, to laugh with, to discipline when they messed up, to reveal Himself as God in the flesh through His miracles.

Jesus Christ is the Lord God who came to deal with all the broken sinfulness that surrounded Him. He did that by taking His perfect sinless life and suffering and dying for those 12 men, for those who tortured and put Him to death, for all mankind, for me, and for you. He transferred all of your sinfulness upon Himself and took it to the cross and become your atoning sacrifice, so that you are responsible for it no more. And in place of that sin, He gives to you His perfect life, and the right standing with God He earned. He gives you life with God now and eternal life to come. He earned that for each and every man and woman and child. And gives it to you in the very Gospel Words that I am preaching and in His words of promise joined with the waters of baptism. Only the All-Mighty Creator God could do all these things. And Jesus Christ is that God that came to do it for you.

Herdman Children Bring Out the Real Meaning of Christmas

Perhaps these are things we can lose track of in the busyness of Christmas, and our familiarity with the story. Perhaps we need someone like the Herdman children to point it out to us.

During the second practice for the Christmas pageant, as the story of Jesus birth was being read by the narrator, Emma Gene, who took the role of Mary, burst out with a shocked comment when she heard that there was no room for Mary and Joseph at the inn: "My God! No room? Not even for a baby Jesus?" When the narrator read about the baby being wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger, she called out to the Sunday School teacher and said, "You mean they tied this baby up and put Him in a feed trough for animals? Where was Child Welfare Service when this was happening?" And when her brother Ralph heard the part about Herod's plot to kill baby Jesus He blurts out, "You mean He just got born and already they want to kill him?" All of these things made the Sunday School teacher, as well as some of the regular kids who had been in the pageant year after year stop and think.

But the most special moment of all came when it was time to sing Silent Night. There was Emma Jean, unable to sing, because she was crying. The tears could be seen running down her cheek. The LORD had just come and revealed to her the wonder that is His birth on Christmas. Jesus got her, and because He did, she got Jesus.

Conclusion

Jesus is the Word made flesh, God the Son who came down because He gets us, all of us. He knows our struggle with sin. Yet He came so that we might know God the Creator as God the Savior. He came to call us as dirty and sinful as we are, to clean us up through the work of His life, death, and resurrection. And to reveal to us through His Word, and the actions of others, the love that moved this God to come down and set up His tent among us now, so that we would have an eternal dwelling with Him to come. Merry Christmas. Amen.