

## 12.25.2023 Christmas Day (John 1:1-14)

On the First Sunday in Advent, our sermon was introduced with the thought that if it were up to us, we would probably choose more sentimental, nostalgic biblical passages to read on particular holy days throughout the Church year. On that Sunday, as we began the season of Advent, I suggested two passages we might find most suitable for the day: the Angel Gabriel greeting the Blessed Virgin Mary with the declaration, “*Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son...*” (Luke 1:30-31), and a passage that describes an angel appearing to Joseph in a dream, saying, “*Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:20-21).

From a sentimental perspective these are good selections, but the Church, in its liturgy, challenges us to go further, to seek a more complete theological understanding of the day. On the First Sunday in Advent, that meant reading a Gospel text that would insist we confront the advent of our Lord. His appearing to every one of us. His descent to knock at the door of our hearts. His desire to enter in and perform a cleansing work of sanctification in us, that our bodies would truly become a temple of His Holy Spirit, a sacred place of worship and prayer in which God dwells.

The Church challenges us to go further, to go beyond our own preferences, and on this Christmas Day we find that challenge in the prologue of the Gospel according to St. John. There we read these inspired words, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” This morning, instead of sentiment and nostalgia, this text directs us to contemplate the Person of Jesus Christ. “*In the beginning...*” At a time and place in which there was no time or place, the Eternal Word, Jesus Christ, already was. “*... and the Word was with God*” Our Savior Christ is the Divine Second Person of the Holy Trinity who was with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit before the world began. “*... and the Word was God.*” Our Lord shared in the Divine nature of the Triune God, existing from all eternity, distinct from the Father and the Spirit - *the Word was with God*, and

equal to the Father and the Spirit - *the Word was God*.

*“The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.”* All things, whether in heaven or on earth, the entire universe, and every being contained therein. The Father spoke *all things* into existence by the Eternal Word. As the psalmist declares, *“By the word of the Lord were the heavens made”* (Psalm 33:6). *“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.”* The living Word is the source of life to every creature. He gives life and being to all that exists, and He, the Author of life is to us, to those who bear His image, *the light*. The Source of all wisdom. The Source of true holiness. The Source of unending joy.

St. John offers this unparalleled description of *the Word*, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and a few verses later declares, *“and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”* The Eternal Word clothed Himself in human flesh, and here John presents his eyewitness account of Emmanuel, God with us, testifying to the world that *“we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

St. John beheld the glory of God, clothed in human flesh, and by appointing this passage to be read on Christmas Day, the Church insists that we go infinitely beyond ourselves, and our own sentimental preferences or holiday traditions, in order that we may, in a sense, behold the same glory, by contemplating the true meaning of that which we celebrate today - the wondrous miracle of the Eternal Word made flesh, the birth of Almighty God in history.

As we consider this birth, we quickly recognize the distinct difference between the birth of our Lord in history, and our own birth. As Oswald Chambers pointed out, our Savior Christ (unlike you and I) *“was born into this world, not from it. He did not evolve out of history; He came into history from the outside... He is the Highest and the Holiest entering in at the lowliest door,”* and just as our Lord came into history, to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to Bethlehem from the outside, *“so He must come into you and I from the outside.”*

Here's a question to ask yourself this Christmas: Have you allowed that to happen? Have you allowed your own personal life to become a "Bethlehem," a birthplace for the Eternal Word of God? Have you offered your self, your soul and body as a living sacrifice to the end that Christ may be formed in you and then delivered into the world? It's an important question for every Christian to consider, and Mary is certainly our example as we contemplate the thought. Just as she, in great humility, so readily offered herself to God, saying, "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word*" (Luke 1:38), so must we offer ourselves to Almighty God in such a way that Christ is formed in us (Galatians 4:19), and grows in us so steadily that the time will come for Him to be delivered into the world through our thoughts, our words, and our actions. We must follow the example of Mary by allowing Christ to grow in us, and by the grace of God, at the proper time, deliver Him into the world.

Christmas is a sentimental holiday filled with meaningful and nostalgic traditions, but we must always be mindful of that which we truly celebrate today, for the true meaning of Christmas is realized in the wondrous miracle that the Word who was *with God* in the beginning, the Word who *was God* in the beginning, *was made flesh and dwelt among us*. Two thousand years ago, God was manifest in human flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ, and the miracle we celebrate today, as people who have been raised to new life in Him, is the truth that Bethlehem isn't just a city, and Christmas isn't just a day, because God calls every Christian to be a "Bethlehem," a birthplace for His Son, and that means Christmas isn't just a day. Christmas is every day that you deliver Jesus into the world He gave His life to save.