

The Rev. Joel Petruschke  
Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
Christmas 2  
January 2, 2022

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

So, as I mentioned in the announcements, today is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Christmas, the Christmas Season being 12 days long, from December 25<sup>th</sup> to January 5<sup>th</sup>.

This Thursday, January 6<sup>th</sup> marks the festival of Epiphany when the Christmas Season concludes.

So we are still in the Christmas season, even though New Year's was yesterday, and typically people think that now the holidays are over.

But not so fast, we are still in the Christmas season.

And on this Second Sunday in Christmas, we have in our reading from the Gospel of John...we have here in our gospel reading for today what amount to the second version of the Christmas story.

Second version of the Christmas story? What can you possibly mean, Pastor?

What I mean is that we have Jesus' birth narrative in Matthew and Luke, which is the first version of the Christmas story.

We have the story in Matthew and Luke of Jesus born in a stable with animals, where shepherds and wise men visit the baby, and angels sing of his birth.

We have that rather sentimental telling of Jesus' birth.

And then...well, and then, we have John's version of Christmas.

And, in John's version, as we see, there are no shepherds and no wise men.

There are no angels and no stable.

There is no sentimentality.

Instead we get all this talk about the Word.

In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us.

Yes, this is quite a different telling of the Christmas story.

It is a Christmas story that doesn't lend itself at all to sentimentality.

The "Word becoming flesh" is not sentimental.

It is theological. It is philosophical. It is what we call the incarnation.

In fact, it has been surmised that this notion of the Word becoming flesh derives at least in part from an ancient philosophical writing by Plato.

PAUSE

In Plato's writing called the *Republic*, Plato describes a dialogue between Plato's brother Glaucon and Socrates.

In this dialogue between Glaucon and Socrates, Socrates describes what has come to be known as the Allegory of the Cave.

In this allegory, Socrates describes a group of people who have lived chained to the wall of a cave all their lives, facing a blank wall.

And these imprisoned people watch shadows projected on the cave's wall from objects that pass in front of a fire outside the mouth of the cave.

The shadows are the prisoners' reality, but are not the accurate representations of the real world.

And the prisoners give names to all of the shadowy objects on the wall.

And this...this Allegory of the Cave...this is Plato's understanding of reality.

We all see only shadows of in this world, but outside the cave...outside this imprisoned existence there is a more substantial reality.

And we can see the connections to John's passage here, can't we?

John speaks of light and darkness, like a fire and shadows.

And John says all things come into being through the light of Jesus, not unlike how the images cast on a wall come into being by passing in front of a fire.

And the prisoners give names to the objects, just as by the Word of God all things are created which then receive names from us.

PAUSE

But then Jesus himself is born and he himself is not some shadow. He is the true light, such that truth came through Jesus Christ.

Jesus reveals the truth, not a shadowy existence.

Jesus is the truth, and as John says later in his gospel, the truth will make you free, a possible commentary on our imprisonment, like the prisoners in the cave.

PAUSE

Yes, the beginning of John's gospel may have been very much influenced by ancient philosophical speculation.

The beginning of John's gospel may have been very much influenced by the Allegory of the Cave.

And John's depiction of Christmas then is very different indeed.

It is not sentimental.

It is philosophical. It is theological. Christmas is the incarnation, the Word becoming flesh.

And, I dare say, there is something profoundly appealing about John's understanding of Christmas.

There is something profoundly attractive (to me anyways) about John's description of Christmas.

Because it succinctly captures the notion that the very power of God, the almighty all-powerful God is embodied in the person of Christ Jesus.

There is something wonderfully profound about the incarnation.

PAUSE

Now, yes, we know from Jesus' birth story in Matthew and Luke that Jesus is the Son of God.

We know from Matthew and Luke that Jesus is the Messiah, that he is Emmanuel, God with us.

We know these things from Matthew and Luke's version of the Christmas story.

But what is unique about John's version of the Christmas story is that the Word...THE WORD is made flesh.

From John's Christmas story we learn of the incarnation.

God's Word takes on flesh.

And why that is significant is because God's Word is the power of God.

God's Word is that which accomplishes what it proclaims.

So, when God the Father speaks creation into being at the beginning of the Bible in the book of Genesis...

When God the Father speaks creation into being, the power that makes that happen is the Word of God which is spoken.

And when the prophets in the Old Testament prophesy concerning the will of God, the power that makes their prophecies come to fruition is the Word of God which is spoken by the prophet.

For the prophets declare, saying, "Thus says the Word of the Lord..." That is how prophets began their proclamation: "Thus says the Word of the Lord..."

The prophets speak God's Word and that word comes to fruition.

And it is this...this power of God contained in the Word of God that the gospel writer John now says is enfleshed.

Think about that.

That Word that created the universe, the Word that gave being to stars and planets, to creatures great and small...the Word that gave existence to all things is the same Word that is now contained a person.

And that Word that prophets declared setting in motion the will of God, setting in motion the events of human history...that same Word is enfleshed now in Jesus.

That is the Christmas story in John's gospel.

And again, it is quite different from Matthew and Luke, who speak of shepherds and wise men and angels and a stable.

John's Christmas story is about God's Word.

But unfortunately we don't see nativity scenes in which Mary and Joseph, shepherds and wise men, angels and stable animals huddled around a manger....

We don't see nativity scenes where instead of a babe in swaddling clothes in a manger, we see in the manger the word "WORD."

Wouldn't that be shocking?

Nor do we see on Christmas mantel pieces along with the words "LOVE, JOY, and PEACE..."

We don't on mantel pieces the word "INCARNATION."

No, the Christmas story of John's gospel does not get the same billing as the Christmas story in Matthew and Luke.

John's version of the Christmas story is more or less overlooked.

Indeed John's Christmas story is relegated to this the second Sunday in Christmas.

Hardly seems fair, does it?

But, Jesus who is born in a stable in Bethlehem is the very Word of God.

And that is why when Jesus speaks things during his ministry they come to pass, Jesus' speaks the Word of God.

That is why when he speaks to a storm, saying, "Be still," the wind and sea obey him.

That is why when he admonishes demons inside possessed persons, saying, "Come out of him," the demons obey him.

That is why when he commands a little girl who died, saying, "Get up," she is raised from the dead.

That is why when Jesus orders Lazarus in the tomb to come out, he does.

God's Word is Jesus' power. God's Word is Jesus' superpower.

That is why Jesus is the INCARNATED Son; the Word is enfleshed in him.

PAUSE

And what's even more amazing is how God's Word enfleshed in Jesus impacts you and me.

John says, "To all who believe in Jesus' name, Jesus gives the power to become children of God."

"To all who believe in Jesus' name, in this Word, Jesus gives the power to become children of God."

God's Word is powerful. God's Word accomplishes what it says.

But it accomplishes what it says in us, if we truly believe it.

PAUSE

No, there are all sorts of Words out there, even demonic words that wield power in this world, too.

Someone tells someone that they are no good. That they are bad. That they are rotten.

And if that person believes it, well, that word has the power to make that person into what it declares.

And if someone tells someone that they will never amount to anything. That they are worthless. That they are incompetent.

And if that person believes what is said, well, that word has the power to create negatively impact that person.

There are other words at work in this world. Words that sow evil and malice, wickedness and contempt.

But it all depends, Friends, on what we believe.

The power of the word all depends on what we believe.

PAUSE

Jesus tells us that we can become children of God, but we need to believe his Word.

And I don't think Jesus is talking about becoming children of God when we have died.

No, I think Jesus is saying we are children of God already, in the here and now, if we believe God's Word.

And this becoming children of God is also what Christmas is about.

Christmas is not just receiving the gift of the Christ child into our world.

Christmas is also about the gift of us becoming children of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus coming into the world at Christmas means very little, if we don't believe it.

Only when we believe in Jesus, do we ourselves become God's children.

Only when we believe in Jesus do we allow for God's Word to live inside us as well.

And only when we believe in Jesus do we become like Jesus, knowing the very love of God, so as to share God's love.

PAUSE

Yes, at Christmas God did not just want to come to be present in the world in Jesus, but Christmas is about God wanting to come into the world to live inside all of us.

To those who believe in his name, in his Word Jesus, he gave power to become children of God.

God wants God's Word to invade all of us, just as God's Word pervades, permeates, and saturates all the universe.

Only by disbelief do we shut out God's Word from us.

Only by belief is God's Word opened to the whole universe.

You and me, we are children of God, if we believe it.

And if we believe it, God's love that was in Jesus, will emanate from us as well.

And so, I wish you all again "Merry Christmas," only on this day, I wish you "Merry Christmas" from John's perspective, such as to say, "Happy Incarnation," because God's Word takes on flesh in you and in me. Amen.