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John 1:1-18
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"The Coming of the Incarnate Word"

It's that time again. Christmas is nearly upon us. Christmas, is of course, the time we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and so it is fitting that we spend some time this evening reflecting on the incarnation -- that glorious gospel truth, that God has come to man in the person of Jesus. We celebrate birthdays of various people, but none like we do for Jesus. And this is for good reason, for Jesus is no ordinary individual.

And so John, in these short 18 verses, declares to us something amazing. This Jesus who came 2000 years ago, though born a man, is also none other than the eternal God who has come in the flesh. We call this the "incarnation." This passage in John is an announcement to us of a decisive turning point in all of history. With the birth of Jesus, God has come to man.

Because of this, God has made himself known in a way that he had not done in the past. Yes, God had revealed himself to man, in different ways and at different times, before this. But here, with the coming of Jesus, mankind has seen and known God in a way far better than before. God had come to man in the person of Jesus. That's what John's account really focuses on more than any of the other accounts of Christ's birth in the gospels.

And so John's account of Christmas calls us to consider this God-man Jesus - it calls us to respond to the incarnation. And so as we look at this passage, we'll be looking at the coming of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. And so this evening, we'll look first at his *divine* nature, then we'll look at his *human* nature, and finally we'll look at his *unique* role - in revealing and relating God to us.

Looking first at Jesus' divine nature -- We see the gospel of John begin with a simple and profound statement. "In the beginning was the Word." For those of you familiar with this passage, you know that this "Word" described here is Jesus. Jesus is the Word. Of course, the first time someone would hear this, they would not instantly know that Jesus is this Word. That's intentional here by John. There's not a clear identification that Jesus is this Word until all the way in verse 14, and Jesus isn't even mentioned by name until verse 17. Yet, clearly this passage is all about Jesus. But, John holds us out in suspense at first, referring to Jesus at first only by this name of the "Word". Imagine hearing just the first two verses for the first time. They would make us ask: Who is this Word that is both identified as God, yet somehow distinct from God? What sort of grand mystery is being described here? John goes on to then to further describe the person and work of this "Word." It makes us ask the question who is this majestic Word? Well, it's Jesus.

Yet, it is actually technically correct that John uses a name other than Jesus or Christ to refer to him in these opening verses. For what John is describing in these opening verses is the eternal Son of God, prior to his becoming human, prior to the incarnation. You see, Jesus, is a human name. It refers to his humanity. This eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, was born and given the human name Jesus. And the name "Christ," is

actually a title, the Greek word for "Messiah." When we speak of Jesus being the Christ, we are referring to his earthly ministry where he secured salvation for us. That's what Jesus did in his life, death, and resurrection. So the name "Jesus Christ" describes him after the incarnation, after he was born on that first Christmas. But in our passage, John begins before all this. He begins before the incarnation. He begins in eternity, looking at the eternal existence of the one here called the Word, the Only Begotten Son and God, the Light, the Life.

John says several things here about who this "Word" is. First, he says that he is God. Verses 1 and 18 say this explicitly. Now to the original audience, identifying this Word with God would not have been *too* shocking. Yet what would have been more startling is to say that this Word, who was God, was also *with* God. No doubt that is why John repeats that statement *twice* in the opening verses. In these opening verses he only says that the Word *is* God once, but he says that the Word was *with* God twice. He's emphasizing this. This Word is not *only* God, but he is *distinct* from God. What does John mean? Does he believe in multiple Gods?

Of course not! John is instead expressing the mystery of the Trinity, how there is one God who exists in three persons. Here John primarily deals with two persons of the Trinity, the Father and the Son. John is clarifying how this Word can be both God and distinct from God. In verses 14 and 18 John describes this Word as the "only begotten" son. So, this Word is the Son of God. John here distinguishes between the Father and the Son. And so this passage describes two of the persons of the Trinity - God the Father, and God the Son. And so John is not a polytheist. He is affirming monotheism - that there is one God, but he is showing that there are distinct persons in this one Triune God. Other scriptures, of course, also further explain this mystery of the Trinity. Now indeed there is mystery here, how God can be both one God, yet existing in 3 persons. But it is this mystery that we have the great joy to consider this Christmas eve! And so here John tells us that this Word is the very Son of God. He is fully divine. He is the only begotten of God the Father. And so, this is the second person of the Trinity, God the Son.

John further shows the divinity of the Word by showing that he is eternal. There was never a time when Jesus did not exist. Verse 1 says that "in the beginning" this Word already was. Now clearly this language, "in the beginning" brings us back to the opening chapter of the Bible, to the book of Genesis when the account of creation is described, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Here, at the beginning of creation, God the Son, already was. He existed even before this finite creation existed. Verse 3 leaves no doubt about this -- it says that *everything* that was created was created through this eternal Son of God, and that *nothing* was created, except through him. Obviously, if this Son of God was somehow created by God, then verse 3 would not be true, because it says that everything was created through him! But no, this eternal Son of God is not a creature; He was not created. He is eternal.

His divinity is also seen here by his work. When we think of the works of God, generally speaking, one of the main things attributed to God as God is creation. God is the creator and sustainer of all things. And surely we can't miss the creation theme in this passage. Verse 3 says in no uncertain terms that the creation of everything happened through the Son of God. We see this coloring the language used throughout this passage. The phrase "in the beginning" and the descriptions of "light", "darkness", and "life", all

echo back to the creation account in Genesis. The power to create is attributed to this eternal Son of God.

John here has made the divinity of Jesus abundantly clear! Jesus is the Son of God who has existed from all eternity! He is both with God, and God himself, as the second person in the Trinity. Through him, all of creation came to be, and apart from him nothing was created. All of this, of course, reminds us that we are people who need and rely on God. We are his creation, and so it is natural for us to want to know him. That is why people often ask themselves, "How did I get here?" "What is the meaning of life?" "Is there a God"? All of creation testifies to the existence of a God, demanding that we seek after him and worship him. And the beauty of our passage today is that with the birth of Jesus, God himself has come to us. This leads us to our next point about Jesus - to consider his human nature. This, of course, came about in the incarnation.

The incarnation of the eternal Son of God is declared in verse 14, "The Word became flesh". Think about the significance of this short statement. It doesn't just say that the Son of God came down to those who were flesh, or that the Son of God appeared like flesh, but that he *became* flesh. When Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary some 2000 years ago, he was really a man. Everything that constitutes humanity, Jesus possessed. Jesus had a full and complete human nature. Yet, this passage reveals to us the mystery that Jesus, though being fully human, was also fully divine. Jesus not only had a full and complete human nature, but he also had a full and complete divine nature. Yet, he was one person, the God-man, Jesus Christ, both Son of God and Son of Man.

There is great mystery here. The incarnation cannot be fully comprehended by our finite minds, but we nonetheless hold to the testimony of Scripture. Because of this mystery, some of the earliest heresies of the church came from confusion over the incarnation. Against all these heresies the church has time and time again declared the truth of Scripture: Jesus has both a human nature and a divine nature, but these both exist in one single united person. This is the heritage of our Christian faith, and it is affirmed here in John 1:14 with the simple words, "the Word became flesh".

But verse 14 goes on to tell us more about this incarnation, and what it says is amazing. Verse 14 says "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us", literally "pitched a tent among us", or "tabernacled among us". And then finishing verse 14, "and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." So it says here first that Jesus pitched a tent. What is the significance of the Son of God pitching a tent among us? Well to appreciate this amazing truth, we must recall back to the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, God had Moses create a Tabernacle in which God would specially dwell among the people. This Tabernacle was a tent. In fact, our English word "tabernacle" actually comes from the Latin word for "tent". The Tabernacle existed among Israel as a portable sanctuary, where God would dwell, until it was later replaced by the Temple in Jerusalem (which was a physical structure then). So in the Old Testament God dwelt among his people in a tent. And so, this is why verse 14 here also talks about glory in connection with pitching a tent. The Old Testament Tabernacle was always associated with the glory of God. When the Tabernacle was first built, the Bible says, "Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exodus 40:34).

Do you see what John is telling us here in verse 14? To say that the Word pitched a tent among us, relates the incarnation to the Tabernacle in the Old Testament. As the Tabernacle was the place where God dwelt among his people, this is even more so with the incarnation. The incarnation is God coming to man to dwell among us. In Jesus, the glory of God has appeared. John tells us that something greater than the Tabernacle has come. The tabernacle and the temple are fulfilled with the incarnation. And indeed the glory of the incarnation, of this ultimate tabernacle, is far better than the types and shadows of the Old Testament. God has come to man, once for all, in the God-man Jesus Christ! God is fully amidst humanity in the person of Jesus. For with the coming of God in Jesus, God has made himself near to us, coming to us even in our own flesh and blood.

This incarnation reminds us of course that we are people who need and rely on God. For to where did Jesus come in his incarnation? He came here, to this physical world of flesh and blood from his eternal heavenly existence. And he came to a "world" which John describes as a place of sin and rebellion, a place that desperately needs salvation and life. Jesus came into a place that rejected him, that hated him, that he might draw those who are truly his own, to himself! Jesus, the God-man, came to save sinners; sinners like each of us. Only God coming to us, could bring salvation to sinners, for only God himself could bear his wrath against sin. Only God himself could meet his standards of righteousness. That is what Jesus did in his life and death. He died on the cross to pay for our sins. And he lived a perfect life of righteousness in our place. He did this to make us right with God. And so this brings us to our final point to consider about Jesus this evening -- his unique role in revealing and relating God to us.

His revealing and relating God to us, of course, is rooted chiefly in the first two points we have already discussed. Jesus can reveal and relate man to God, because he is God and man. But think about this: God is the almighty creator, infinite and eternal. We on the other hand, are finite creatures. Though we have been created in the likeness of God, we are at our best *like* God. There is always a fundamental difference between the creator and the creature. And this great divide is heightened by the fact that we as humans have sinned against God. We've marred the glorious image of God that he had given to us. So, in virtue of the fact that we are creatures, and sinful creatures at that, we realize that we can't truly know God on our own. Yet with coming of Jesus, we can now truly know God and be in relationship with him!

For Jesus has far surpassed any of the previous ways in which God has revealed and related himself to man. In the past, God had spoken through different prophets. Now he speaks through his Son. Verse 18 explains why this is so significant. It says, "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." The great prophet Moses wasn't allowed to see the face of God (Ex 33:20). But, Jesus is the eternal Son of God. Jesus is the only human that can claim to really and truly know God in all his essence, in all his fullness, because Jesus in his divinity is God himself, the Son who comes from the bosom of God the Father. And Jesus came to reveal God to us. This point is illustrated in John 14:8-9, where the disciple Philip asked Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father." Jesus answered Philip saying, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father!" God the Son has revealed God the Father to us.

But according to our passage, Jesus does not only reveal God to us, but he brings us into relationship with God. John 1:17 says, "For the law was given

through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." The law reveals how we fall short of having a relationship with God. But Jesus brings grace and truth. Jesus, by his life, death, and resurrection, overcame the sin in our lives and brought us from darkness to the light, from death to life. This work of Jesus is a gracious gift of God. And so that is how we can now have a relationship with God: this grace and truth from Jesus came to us, that we might be called children of God.

Children of God - To us who believe in Christ and trust in him for life, we are called children of God. This is what is at the center of this passage! Verses 12-13 declare, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right 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." We who believe, are those born of God and drawn to Christ in faith. We're his adopted children. This is a glorious truth! Jesus not only reveals God to us, but through Jesus, we can have a relationship with God. And this is a family relationship, a relationship where God is pleased to call himself our father, and to call us his children!

Again, this reminds us that we are people who need and rely on God. This passage assumes that it is a wonderful and amazing thing for Jesus to reveal God to us and to bring us into a relationship with him! People generally want to know God, and if possible, to have a relationship with him. Of course, sin gets in the way of this, and people will often sinfully repress their inner desires to know God. But, you can't ignore human history that shows countless people groups striving to somehow know the divine, and to get in touch with the spiritual side of life. This yearning for our creator is something innate to us as humans. And here John declares how Jesus is the only way to satisfy this yearning, for he alone truly reveals and relates God to us.

And so on this Christmas Eve, my challenge to us all is to know Jesus. If we are to know God, and have a relationship with him, it will be only through Jesus. The gospel of John presents two options. There are either those who are in darkness, or those who have been pulled out of the darkness and brought to the light. Which are you? If you are one who has come to the light, if you are here today as a Christian, then this is my charge to you today: Get to know Jesus even better. If we can know God through Jesus, then the better you know Jesus, the better you know God. Foster that relationship. Foster it through the Word and Prayer. Read the Bible in which you learn about Jesus! Pray to God in which you engage the Almighty, in which you will be surely changed. And foster your relationship with Jesus by participating in the church. The church is the body of Christ, and so being involved in church is also a way to grow in our relationship with Jesus!

But I'd also like to address those of you out there today who have not yet come to Jesus in faith and trust. If you do not truly know Jesus, please listen carefully to what I am about to say. My call to you today is simple, coming straight from verse 12: receive and believe. Receive and believe. Receive our Lord and Savior Jesus. Believe in him. Believe that he is the eternal Son of God who has come to earth for you, to live the life of righteousness that you could not live, and to pay the penalty for your sins which you could not pay. Receive and believe. Know God, and be in relationship with him, through Jesus. Receive and believe that you might have freedom from the bondage of sin and death, and instead have the privileges and the rights of the children of God. Receive and believe that

you might be saved from eternal damnation and be given eternal life. What's offered to you today is the greatest of Christmas gifts.

Isn't this what Christmas is all about? At Christmas, we remember the greatest of gifts that God came down to us, to save us from our sins and to bring us into a vital relationship with him. And isn't this service this evening, a display of what he has called us to do, to receive and believe? This very evening we are declaring that we receive and believe Jesus. We celebrate his incarnation and declare that we trust in him for our life. Let's keep that in our hearts and minds this season every time we wish someone else, "Merry Christmas!" Amen.

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