

Sermon Text for November 27, 2022

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Isaiah 7:10-14, John 1:1-2, 14

“What Christmas”

So here we are, a transition has taken place within this church as we go from ordinary time to celebrating the start of Advent. The sanctuary and the rest of the building looks beautiful. We emphasize Advent in this church in theory because it is a time in our church calendar when we emphasize an expectation of Jesus coming back. But how many of us really focus on that theological aspect of our faith and don't most of us just like the beauty because it reminds us of Christmas, not of Advent. Not many of us are enamored with Advent, but all of us fall for Christmas.

In some churches there are actual worship actions that are taken to ensure that we remember that we are in Advent. We light a candle a Sunday and some liturgy associated with that. Some churches refuse to sing Christmas carols until Christmas Eve, yeah, we don't do that. So I would say that in this church the lines are easily blurred between Advent and Christmas much to the downfall of Advent. We, here, lose that sense of expectancy because as soon as Thanksgiving is over we transition, well, to Christmas. So, to go along with that theme we are going to be looking at the Ws of Christmas throughout Advent. Today What, then Why, then Who, then When. What I hope this creates in all of us is a deeper understanding of what Christmas is.

This deeper understanding will, hopefully, strip away the culture associations with Christmas that will give us a desire to hang on and wait for the coming of Jesus in a way that is active and healthy, as opposed to skipping right away from Thanksgiving to Christmas with our gifts and our celebrations and our festivities. The birth of a child to a virgin, or a young girl, and this child being Emmanuel, God with us, is not only the sign that God is with us, but an actual confirmation that God is physically with us in the Word made flesh. This is what Christmas. God with us, physically, and if we actually believe that, it makes all the difference in the world.

Both of our Scriptures today point to God in the flesh is Emmanuel.

READ

I hope you had a great Thanksgiving. The transition is real in this church from Thanksgiving to Advent, we had a great team on Saturday put the church together so that you could come and enjoy the decorations. A traditional Advent story in Scripture, which many also

use for Christmas, is our first reading that we saw in Isaiah 7. It is important to understand this story because it contains the earliest references in Scripture of what would become the Christmas story. Let's understand what is taking place.

This is a conversation between Ahaz, who was the king of Judah, so he was the king of the people of God, and Isaiah, a prophet of God. Ahaz is faced with what he thought was the inevitable fall of Jerusalem on his watch and he was pretty much resigned to the downfall. But Isaiah said no, this is not going to happen, God will rise up and defend you. Since you don't believe this, Ahaz, ask for a sign that this is going to happen. Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign.

Isaiah says fine, I'll give you a sign anyway, the young girl is going to have a child and when this child is born he will be called Emmanuel, which we know means God with us. For the people of God this then became a timeless promise that when the person who is to come who will liberate the people from both physical and spiritual captivity, when that person comes, He will be Emmanuel. The birth of a baby boy to a young girl will not only be a sign that God is with us, as we read here in Isaiah, but that child will be the Savior himself.

Over time this is what the people of God expected. A Savior, who was called the Messiah, the one anointed and chosen by God to lead his people, would be born and when He was born he would be Emmanuel, God with us. So from the time of Isaiah all the way to the first century the people of God were waiting for this Savior to be born. We know that because Herod tells the wise men that this Emmanuel would be born in Bethlehem and he knew that because the prophet Micah said so.

This is really important. It isn't just Isaiah who tells us of the upcoming birth of a Savior that we are to wait for, but Micah, and other Scriptures sprinkled throughout the Old Testament that points to the birth of a Messiah, one chosen by God who would be the Savior of God's people, who would be Emmanuel, God with his people. For us, as followers of Jesus, we see this story of Isaiah and we can take comfort knowing that we are a part of the salvation story that has roots back to the time of Isaiah. But actually, what we are going to see, is that Emmanuel, God with us, has roots even before back, back even before Creation.

This takes us to John. Before we move to John I want to ensure that we are clear on Isaiah and why this was important. This sign of Emmanuel was a literally sign that God would protect his people from impending doom, which then was taken as a general sign by the people of God that a Savior was going to be born who would be Emmanuel, God with us. This Savior

the people were expecting and waiting for. This Savior, we know, was born on Christmas to a virgin named Mary. Now we go to John.

The first 18 verses of the Gospel of John is called the prologue. It sets up for us everything else that follows in the Gospel, and honestly sets up for us everything else that we believe. There is no more important section of the Bible to understand than this section, and yet it is also very confusing if you just read it straight through. We have split it up to cover the verses that we need for today for What Christmas.

Look at how the Gospel begins and when you hear the words it should remind you for another beginning in the Bible. In the beginning was the Word... Go to Genesis 1:1 and there you will read: In the beginning when God created... Let's flesh this out a bit so that we are clear on where we are going here. When Genesis speaks about the beginning it is referring to that time before anything is created. There are no heavens and no earth. Genesis says there was only *tohu* and *bohu* which in Hebrew means that there was only darkness and void. Nothing but *tohu* and *bohu*, nothing at all.

John tells us that in the midst of that darkness and void God was present, Genesis also tells us that. John tells us that the Word of God was present in that darkness and void, before anything else was present. That Word of God was God. It become very clear in vs.14 that this Word of God over the eons and over history manifests itself as Jesus. Clearly in Scripture the Word is identified with Jesus, but this is not the origin story of Christmas in John, it is the origin story of all things. We have to understand that the origin story of Christmas is not just to provide a celebration. It tells us how all things began. From this story all stories emanate, including Christmas.

You can't have Christmas without John 1 because if the Word doesn't become flesh, if the Word doesn't become Jesus, you just have God who is at a distance and is not one of us. I don't want to get bogged down in the weeds with this because Christmas is so light and airy and not something, certainly not families, want to mess with and lose its shine and luster. But we have to nail down this aspect that we see in vs.14 that the Word become flesh, which means to us that God became flesh, God became one of us. We are going to look at a bunch of Scriptures that refer to this lest you go into the heresy that Jesus was just like us, but not actually one of us. He was, and keep in mind that when the Word become flesh it does not cease to be God.

Romans 1:3 Paul tells us about the good news of Jesus who was descended from David according to the flesh. Then again in 8:3 he states that God sent himself, his son Jesus in the

likeness of sinful flesh. We read even more clearly in I John 4:2 – By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

Jesus was God in the flesh, born in the flesh on Christmas morning. We will get into the Why of Christmas but let me just leave you with Hebrews 2:17 as a bit of a teaser for that one. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters, that's us, in every respect, so that he might be merciful and faithful. Christmas is not a celebration of good times had by all, but a recognition that God became flesh and dwelt among us, God is Emmanuel in every respect, even in flesh and blood, so that he might be merciful and faithful to us.

This is most clearly explained in I Timothy 3:16 – Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: God was revealed in the flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the Gentiles, believe in throughout the world, taken up in glory. The Gospel of John begins with the proclamation that Jesus is God in the flesh, Emmanuel. It ends with Thomas, you remember doubting Thomas, who was the only one who made this statement of faith that is the most powerful. In John 20:28 he proclaims to Jesus – “My Lord and my God.”

What is Christmas? It is Jesus in the flesh, God with us. The Word became flesh and to John we see that this person was someone who despite all of his gifts and was present at creation was thirsty, hungry and at other times was emotionally and physically exhausted. He went to a shameful death after he had a shameful birth and after he lived a shameful life. This is Christmas for us, the celebration is ours, but it certainly was not his as he underwent suffering, torture and death.

What is Christmas? It is the story of the origin of the cosmos and the human race, this Gospel of John will be a story about fresh beginnings, a new human race. I can't encourage us all enough to dive deep this Advent season into the meaning of Christmas. It is great to get caught up in charity and reaching out and helping people and the festivities and the celebrations. But we have to first get caught up in Jesus, the Word became flesh, Emmanuel. Amen.