

Text: John 1:1-14

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning.

³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

⁶There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.** We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. - NIV

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, grant that the birth of your only Son in the flesh may set us free from our old bondage under the yoke of sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law. Alleluia. (Galatians 4:4,5a cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

I wonder what Christmas is like in Ukraine this year. I hear services are canceled in Bethlehem in homage to lives lost on both sides of the fight surrounding the Gaza Strip. I wonder if the celebration will be muted, tamped down by the bombs and bullets, just another casualty of the wars that rage on in these and other places. I wonder if the lights twinkle with the same brightness as families enter hospitals with loved ones gathered round beds where news isn't what they wanted this holiday season.

Are you tired of the bad news? I know I am. Every time I flip through my news feed to catch up with what is going on the world around me it is a barrage of the bad, the worse, and the ugliest of stuff. Very rarely is there even a glimmer of hope. Hatred, Envy, Death, Destruction, a quick read usually leaves the commands of God completely decimated in minutes. But I guess that shouldn't be shocking. John puts it this way in our lesson today, *The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.* Apparently, nothing is new under the sun for even when Jesus came, well John announced, *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*

Ah, but then before I get too self-righteous about all of it, have I helped the situation? Or do I find that I shake my head and bow my head only to pray like the pharisee in the temple thanking God

that I'm not like that when in reality the angels who have been assigned guard detail over this sinful wretch have far too often had to bear witness to atrocities too numerous to number.

But then that's sin for you. It easily infiltrates our hearts and minds and once within, well I flee the light for fear that I'll be found out. There is really only one solution for it. The Word! ¹*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* ²*He was with God in the beginning.* ³*Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.* ⁴*In him was life, and that life was the light of men.*

God is the only one who has the power create and recreate His people. He is the only one who has the power to change hearts and minds so that they do not flee from Him and instead do the opposite. What we are powerless to do, He alone can. But it is not with a brilliant display of power, well perhaps in it's own way it is, but not the display we were expecting.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. *We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* Yes, what we could not do, God will do for us. While we were and often are hopelessly lost in the darkness of sin and in the wicked word of the world around us, He will not be. He will dwell among us, did dwell among us! That's the message of Christmas God becoming like one of us, save one large difference. Christ is without sin, so that we might be saved.

Yes, the manger is eternally tied to the cross. It's the why of the magnificent mystery that is the incarnation, Christ taking on flesh for us. It's so that He can die! That he can pay for the sins of a fallen world, of a fallen people, for yours and mine. This is the glory of Christmas, that God's love for us is so great that He would give up His Son for us, that His Son would die for us.

This is the good news of great joy that is for all people. To a world trapped in sin. Bombarded by bad news on every side God provides hope. *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.* This message, this Word, this new, it recreates us to be children of God. This doesn't happen because of birth right, our own might (brain power or brawn), it has nothing to do with humanity save this. God joined it. God joined the fight for us and through faith in Him (another Christmas gift from a gracious God) you are saved.

Wanna beat back the darkness? Wanna change the World around you? Wanna hear Good News for a change? Listen to the Word dear friends. Share that good news of great joy with the world around you, with family and friends. We have seen the glory, heard the glory. The history really started way back in Eden but at Christmas the Savior is born. God joins in the fight in the flesh for us. His righteousness counts for everything and everyone. His Cross frees us all. Keep listening this year, not just in Bethlehem but beyond ... at the Jordan River at His baptism, on the streets and in the houses and synagogues as He teaches, in the upper room as He leaves us a supper unlike any other, at the cross when He gives himself for us, yes at an empty tomb filled with joy and triumph and even now, even now as he guards and guides His people through that Word as He brings us home to Himself forever.

I wonder, well I wonder if the celebrations are muted or if they might just be amplified. Yep, you heard that correctly. I wonder if Christmas might even be sweeter without the decorations and gifts piled high. I wonder if through the rubble, the real message of this season shines even more brightly. I wonder if the lights don't shimmer all the more through tears made confident in a victory that even death cannot take away. No, I know it! In a world full of bad news and even worse circumstances, Christmas is Good News of Great Joy! And it is for all people! Because into the mire ... into the muck of our sin-rotted world and sin-stained lives, God has come! Come to save! Yes, the Word is made flesh for US! ... for You!!! Amen!!