

The Word Became Flesh
 John 1:1-18
 Temple Baptist Church
 December 24, 2017

Reading: John 1:1-18 (ESV)

Introduction: “O come, O come, Emmanuel / And ransom captive Israel / That mourns in lonely exile here / Until the Son of God appears / Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel / Shall come to thee, O Israel

O come, Thou Day-Spring Come and cheer / Our spirits by Thine advent here / Disperse the gloomy clouds of night / And death’s dark shadows put to flight / Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel / Shall come to thee, O Israel”

The words of this song and the familiar music that often accompanies them were developed at different times in history. The words, initially written in Latin, were first documented in Germany in the early eighteenth century, whereas the tune most familiar in our English-speaking world has its origins in fifteenth century France.

“Veni, Veni, Emmanuel” as it would have been sung in Latin, is a heart-felt call for the Lord Jesus Christ to return. It’s the believer’s cry to have *God with us*, which is the literal meaning of the name Immanuel in Hebrew – God with us.

During this season of Advent, Christians await the return of Jesus, the Son of God, to once again be God with us in the flesh. Tomorrow, Christmas day, we’ll remember and celebrate the arrival of the Prince of Peace who was born in a barn roughly two thousand years ago. For some of us, the old, old story is one that you’ve heard all your lives. It’s one that we can remember our pastor or our parents reading to us when we too were but children. Perhaps for some of us this morning, this is the first time we’re hearing the old, old story of Jesus. No story, whether factual or fiction, is better than the true story of Jesus’ birth, life, death, resurrection, and reign. Yes, this is indeed the old, old story that has been passed down from generation to generation for the past two thousand years, but the birth of Jesus – the Son of God – coming into the world as a baby in a barn isn’t the first-time God the Father’s only Son has graced Creation with His perfect presence.

The old, old story and older still

In John 1, the author opens his gospel with a very similar phrase to that found in the very first verse of Scripture – Genesis 1:1 which reads, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Likewise, John writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Although there is repetition between these two opening phrases, John is pointing to the fact that the Word was already there at the beginning of Creation. The Word was not part of the created world, but rather it was present at the Creation itself.

The author goes on to say that “the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Word was God is reference to the pre-existence of Jesus Christ before any other created thing. With all due respect, whether you believe that Creation took place over a period of six thousand years or over the course of many millions of years, the time frame is relatively irrelevant. What matters is that God created the world and the Word – Jesus Christ – was present and active in that Creation process.

John 1:3 says, “All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” God created everything out of nothing. There wasn’t pre-existing energy or matter like the lies the Gnostics taught during the first century and other new age religions tell us today. All that had existed prior to Creation was God – Father, Holy Spirit, and the Son Jesus Christ through whom all things were created.

John continues with his description of the son of God in v. 4-5 where he writes, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” The theme of life is something that the Gospel of John tells us is always on the lips of Jesus. We find this in John 3:16 where Jesus says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal *life*.” Likewise, in John 5:24 Jesus states, “...whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal *life*.” John 10:10 reads, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I [Jesus] came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” The book of John continues with the theme of life in the same way that it starts when we hear the words of John 20:31, which say, “but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have *life* in his name.”

The old, old story of the Word – Jesus - coming to earth in the flesh two thousand years ago is the greatest story ever told, but before the Word took on the perishable body of a sinful world, He existed for all eternity past, present, and future. The Word became flesh so that He could redeem the world by giving life and life eternal to those who believe in Him as Lord and Savior. Friends, if you don’t know Jesus – the Word – the Son of God – as your Lord and Savior and you’re sensing His Holy Spirit tugging on your heart to believe this morning please talk to me after the service. And if you don’t know me or don’t feel comfortable sharing with me, that is okay. However, I want to encourage you share the Spirit’s prompting on your heart with another believer so that they can help you begin the journey toward joy and wholeness.

The right to become children of God

In John 1:6-8 we’re introduced to John the Baptist, a man that spoke prophetically about the coming of Jesus Christ. Prior to John the Baptist’s prophetic voice there had been four hundred years of silence where no prophecy was heard. As a result, certain people were so fascinated with him that he was put on a pedestal that was encroaching on the one that belonged to Jesus, and Him alone. For this reason, we find John the Baptist setting the record straight by

saying that he is not the light, but rather came to bear witness about the light, so that all might believe through him.

John 1:9-11 says, “The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”

Ever since sin entered in the world men and women have tried time and time again to obtain enlightenment outside of the true enlightenment that comes only through Jesus Christ. Acquiring wealth, possessions, and status have been some of the more popular options throughout history that people have strived for in a vain attempt to obtain enlightenment. The funny thing is that even though our current culture is separated from ancient societies by thousands of years, many times we don't see the light any more clearly than they did. Far too often we attempt to grasp truth in the same meaningless ways that people did two thousand years ago. We try gaining enlightenment through self-actualization – by realizing the fulfillment of our potential. *If only I can get this type of job where I make this amount of money. Or if only I can lose the weight and get back into my old jeans. Or if only my children can experience success like I did. Or if only I can impress those people who said I wouldn't amount to anything. Or only once I finish my Master's degree. Or only once I become the best me possible.* Friends, no matter how much we may think we are, we are not the light that has come into the world!

History does indeed repeat itself, but it doesn't have to. Jesus is the true light that has come into the world. His light can be seen. The question is, are we going to welcome and receive the light with open hearts? Jesus came to the Jewish people – God's chosen nation. One would expect that they would open the door and welcome the Son of God with open arms, but instead they rejected Him. They rejected the true light that had come into the world who brought with Him life, and life to the fullest measure.

To reject the life that comes through Jesus Christ and Him alone, is death. Folks, I'm not going to sugar coat it – Hell is a real place and the only possible destination for those who do not come into relationship with Christ. It's not a popular view, especially in a culture like ours where the biggest sin is offending someone, but it's true. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is offensive, because it doesn't cater to our wants and desires that have been distorted by our sinful nature. If we knew everything that God knows, then we would desire the same things for ourselves that He desires for us. The point of salvation through Jesus Christ isn't to be spared from the torment of Hell (although that is a bonus). Rather, the point of believing in and submitting ourselves to Jesus Christ is that in doing so we glorify our Creator God who is worthy of all honor and praise. John writes in v. 12-13, “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 do not reach the pinnacle of fulfillment, becoming a child of God, through our own power, but only through the Son of God who has come into the world.

Full of grace and truth

In v. 14, John once again returns to the language of the Word *as* God when he writes, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

A few days ago, I visited a man in the hospital that had just learned that his cancer had spread and that, outside of divine intervention, there was no chance of recovery. With tears in his eyes, he looked at me and said, “I must have done something bad.” and then asked me, “What do you think?” I think in that moment a proper response given the man’s deep pain around his recent diagnosis would have simply been to say, “I’m sure it feels that way to you. I can’t begin to imagine what you’re going through.” But rather the only thought that kept flooding my mind was, *We’ve all done something really bad. We’re guilty. You’re guilty, I’m guilty, the person sitting in the car next to us at the red light is guilty, the Wal-Mart cashier is guilty, the person working in finance at a major corporation is guilty, the producers at CNN and FOX news are guilty. We’re all guilty!* And the only just punishment for our guilt is death in this life and in the next. But, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Right now, there are many of us that are carrying around an extreme amount of guilt for sin that we have committed in our past. The weight of this guilt has left us paralyzed from experiencing the joy Jesus wants us to have in and through Him. You fear that if others found out about this sin that you would be forever shamed and left to a miserable lonely existence. And so, you work tirelessly to keep your sin secret – to keep it under wraps. You think, *If they never find out, I won’t be alone. If they never find out, they’ll still love me.*

Friends, there isn’t a single one of us that can keep our sin hidden from God. He, who exists before time, in time, and after time knows our every thought, our every action, and our every attitude. We’re not getting one over on Him. But listen to these words from Psalm 103:11-13 that the Lord says to those of us who repent of our sin – to those of us who fear Him – “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.”

There is no sin – past, present, or future – that when repented of is not completely removed from the sight of God. John 1:16 says, “And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” We say, “God, I’ve lied” He says, “Forgiven.” We say, “God, I’ve cheated.” He says, “Forgiven.” We say, “God, I’ve been prideful” He says, “Forgiven.” We say, “God, I haven’t believed” He says, “Forgiven.” We say, “God, I haven’t loved.” God says, “I still love you – you are forgiven.” Grace upon grace could read, *Grace upon grace upon grace upon grace upon grace upon grace upon grace.* Take a moment to let those words *full of grace and truth* truly sink in this morning.

John ends his section by stating, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

When Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth in the flesh, the law, which was given by Moses was replaced. Followers of God no longer needed to observe the law, but were instead called into a relationship of love and obedience to Jesus Christ.

Friends, through the Father’s revelation of the Word – through Jesus – we are able to receive a much clearer expression of God’s character. To see the Word become flesh – to see Jesus take on human form with all of its shortcomings and weakness is to see the love of God on full display for His creation. The Father God made His Son Jesus known so that we could know Him.

As we celebrate the birth of our Sovereign Lord and Savior tomorrow may we experience and express the words that the old, old song tells us – Rejoice, rejoice, for God is with us.

Amen.