**Preaching Notes for Christmas Day (December 25, 2015)**

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**John 1:1-14**

This passage is so very familiar, and its words and images so breathtaking that I always feel a little bit sad about the fact that lots of congregations never hear John’s birth narrative proclaimed in worship. Why? Because so many churches do not worship on Christmas Day unless it happens to fall on a Sunday. If you are not gathering for worship on this day, consider making some fancy copies of John’s narrative and sending them home with folks on Christmas Eve with instructions to read them when they gather around the tree to open their presents in the morning! What a lovely way to start Christmas Day that would be!

I am reminded of a Christmas Day service at Christ United Methodist Church in Algonquin, Illinois, probably a decade ago. That year, our Advent theme had been “Come Home for the Holidays.” Our worship team had outfitted the stage with a cozy fireplace hung with four stockings, a family Christmas tree, and a recliner borrowed from one of our generous members. On that Christmas morning, worshipers had been instructed to come to church wearing their slippers. The man who had loaned us his recliner, who happened to stand about six and a half feet tall, made a grand entrance as he came strolling down the aisle during the announcements in a pair of size 12, fuzzy brown Pluto slippers. He announced that he was on a mission to retrieve his recliner and take it home as soon as the service ended. Four weeks without his favorite chair had been a big sacrifice, and he was ready for it to be over. He proceeded to walk up on the stage, sit down in his chair in front of the fireplace, and tilt back in a full recline for the remainder of the service. It was hilarious.



John’s Gospel begins with an unexpected announcement being made by an unlikely character: There was a man sent from God, and his name was John. He came strolling into this world, bigger than life, to give his testimony to all who would listen. He did not come to testify about himself or his own role. He came to testify about someone else: the light that was coming into the world. Who was this light? The light was the Word made flesh, Emmanuel, God living among us full of grace and truth.

When we wake up on Christmas morning, what will be looking for? Will we be running to gather around the tree so we can hear the Word of God proclaimed as if it is the greatest gift we could ever receive? Is our first thought about Jesus, the Word of God who came into the world to shine a warm light into the overwhelming darkness of human sinfulness? Or will our first thoughts on Christmas morning be about which presents underneath that tree are for us, how soon we need to get the turkey in the oven, and whether the children will be satisfied with what Santa brought?

I know it is very hard to push back against the culture’s hijacking of this holy day. Perhaps I am even coming across as a bit of a Scrooge to even suggest such a thing. But the gift of Christ has been born into the world! How can we not call people to testify to that light, the Word of God made flesh? For we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth!

Everything else pales in comparison to this gift, don’t you think? I know you do, or you wouldn’t be in the job of preaching the gospel.

So if you aren’t having church on Christmas Day, what can you do as a pastor to remind your congregation that the greatest gift they will receive this day and every day is the gift of salvation brought by the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Remind them. Find a way.

[**Isaiah 52:7-10**](http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=101#hebrew_reading)

This passage would best serve as inspiration for a congregational response to the proclamation of the good news from John’s gospel. Perhaps you could use these verses in the first part of your prayer of Great Thanksgiving if you are celebrating Holy Communion on this day, perhaps something like this:

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is right, and a good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth. You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life. When we turned away and our love failed, your love remained steadfast. You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through the prophets.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion.  
  
Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

*(Continue from here using the standard setting.)*

[**Hebrews 1:1-4 (5-12)**](http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=101#epistle_reading)

In these first verses of the letter to the Hebrews, the author says that Jesus occupies a position with God that is superior to that of the angels. It says that God spoke to the ancestors of these early Jewish Christians through the prophets. But now God has spoken through the Son, whom God has appointed heir of all things. God’s son is a reflection of God's glory, the exact imprint of God's very being, and sustains all things by his powerful word. None of these attributes is true of angels. God did not call any angels God’s son, nor did God call upon angels to worship anyone but Jesus, whom God called a son.

Hebrews teaches us that, under the new covenant, all of creation is subject not to all human beings, but to one human being. This one special human being was sent to give us a glimpse of God, a glimpse of what God is like and what God sees, and a glimpse of ourselves from the point of view of God. As the Gospel writer puts it, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” Christ is co-eternal with the Father, and as his followers, we are subject to him, as all things are subject to him.

In Jesus Christ, in his example and his life, and through his suffering and his death, we were given a glimpse of human perfection from the point of view of God. We were given a blueprint for living. We were given a perfect and complete and holy vision of what God intended human beings to be.

God didn't give us an angel, a spiritual being, an unattainable, unreachable entity that we could not see or feel or understand. God gave us a living, breathing, flesh and blood person to be our example. In doing this, God set us up to try and achieve that goal, to try our best to follow the example given to us, as living, breathing, flesh and blood people.