

St. David's Episcopal Church  
First Sunday after Christmas, December 31, 2017  
Text: John 1:1-18

Well, That's That! Christmas is done! Trees along the roadside waiting for the garbage truck attest to it.

It's time to put the decorations back in their boxes – minus those few that broke, of course. It's time to get some great sales and deals – malls are more crowded than on Black Friday. It's a chance to catch up on sleep after trying unsuccessfully to entertain and love all the relatives. It's time to get the house back to normal for the routine of the New Year.

But, wait, Folks! There are 12 days of Christmas. And the lessons for these days give us a sense of the expanse of time between the birth of Jesus, and some of the other important events that happened around it. These days, this short Christmas season puts us in touch with the fact that the incarnation was not something that occurred just in the moment of conception, or in the moments of delivery. Instead, the incarnation was something that unfolded over a long period of time, something that began unfolding at the beginning of time as we know it. Something that spoke this very universe into existence.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

John is reminding us that Christmas begins where Genesis begins, in the beginning, with God in Creation. The Word is God in action, God creating, God revealing God's self, the one the church has named the second person of the Trinity. The Word was with God, and this Word was God.

Now the drama begins. This Word enters the world in a new way, but remains unacknowledged, unrecognized, even by people who should have received the Word. But the Word persists, with that persistence we call love.

And it is here John makes his most astounding claim. He puts together what human reason would say are incompatible. He announces that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

On the one hand, flesh: humanity in its finite frailty. Not the body simply, but human nature as subject to suffering, decay, ignorance, and destruction. It is this that the Word becomes by choice.

The Word, the structure that underlies everything, the way we are meant to live, the purpose of existence. The Word, the cosmic God who creates and who sustains the entire marvelous universe, from unimaginable galaxies down to unimaginable subatomic particles – this Word becomes flesh, a baby who wets and cries and shivers in the cold.

Unlike Matthew and Luke with all their imagery, John tells the Christmas story – in nine words. “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” He who was with God in creation, the one who is God revealing himself to humanity, this one became a person, became flesh – as completely human as you and I. Not God in a people-suit; not a really good person who God rewarded and made special; not a super angel God created early and saved up for Bethlehem.

But a person, who was the Word – who was God’s own self. Soaring words for the most down-to-earth thing that ever happened. But it’s still the Christmas story, still the story Matthew and Luke tell – the story of the birth of Jesus.

And what John, and Luke and Matthew, what all three Gospels all say about Christmas is that a new light begins to shine. Gradually, quietly, but with absolute certainty, and by that light we can begin to see.

By that light we can begin to see who we are and who we are created to be. For it is in the person of Jesus that what it means to be a human being is finally made clear. In him we see that our lives are made whole only as we surrender in love and service; in him we see that really being alive means risking everything for – and because of – the love of God and the realm of God. In him we see that hope needs never be abandoned – never – and that we contain possibilities beyond our imagining.

Also, by that light that has come into the world we begin to see God clearly for the first time. “No one has ever seen God,” John reminds us. But God is made known to us in Jesus. This means that everything we ever thought about God, everything we had figured out, everything that we were sure we knew about God – all of this is put to the test in Jesus. Who God is, in relationship to us, is fully revealed in Jesus. Not in one saying or one parable, or one miracle, but in all of Jesus – in his life, his ministry, his teaching, his death and resurrection; in these all together we finally have the light we need to see God.

The light of Christ, the Word made flesh, comes among us at Christmas, and we celebrate its coming into the world. God has revealed himself and his love to us in Christ.

Folks, let us not forget. As we resume our daily routines, as we dismantle the tree, as we put the Christmas decorations away, let us not put the light of Christ away along with the tree lights and the star. When we put away the creche’ with the baby in the manger, let’s not leave the living Christ in the manger backed safely away until the next day of adoration.

Let’s keep the light of Christmas, the living Christ in our hearts, recognizing holiness in the everyday, in the mundane, and drawing that holiness forth into our lives, into the world. In lives full of work, keeping bills paid, writing papers or doing homework, let us redeem that work from insignificance, and find the holiness in it. For the good news of Jesus’s birth is that all time is holy. Nothing has to be insignificant.

So...! Do you entertain Jesus as merely an agreeable diversion? Or are you ready for something more? John wanted us to let the Word of God that created all that is be present in our day-to-day existence. I’ll warn you: This is risky business. It will always be far easier to confine Jesus to holidays and perhaps Sunday mornings. It will always be far more difficult to invite the light of Christ into every area of life.

Are you ready for the light of Christ to shine in your darkness? What about the parts of you that you hope no one notices? What about the parts you like to keep tucked under the bed or in the back of the closet, so to speak? Are you ready for the light of Christ to shine there, too?

The celebration is over. But the light of Christ was not meant to be tucked back in the attic with the decorations. The love of God as it shines through Jesus was meant to take root in your soul. And it still can, if you make room in your everyday life for light to shine in the darkness. In 2018, let it be so. Amen.