

A Savior Has Been Born to You

1. **The Word Made Flesh**
2. **The Life-Giving Light**
3. **The With-Us God**

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well, did Santa Clause come last night? Did you get all the presents you wanted? Did you get your gifts wrapped, your decorations up, your cards mailed, your house cleaned, your meals prepared, your kids dressed up, your pictures taken, your travel plans finalized? Did you get everything accomplished that society expects for a perfect Christmas?

It's not that there's anything wrong with gifts or meals or family traditions. But it's so easy for us to become wrapped up in the trappings and the stress and the secular sentimentalities of Christmas that we forget what Christmas really means. Let's not let that happen to us this year!

Today we've come to celebrate and be reminded of and renewed in the fact that, after centuries of prophecy and anticipation, God touched humanity in an unprecedented way. The Creator joined his creation; God became man; our Savior was born. Last night, in the warm glow of candlelight, we peered into the manger; and in the warm glow of angel-light we heard, **“A Savior has been born to you” (Lk 2:11)**. This morning we ponder the mystery of that manger and that message: **“A Savior has been born to you.”** We needed saving, from the darkness of sin and the from the frivolity of a Christ-less Christmas. So God gave us Jesus. And in the profound words of John 1, we see just what kind of Savior has been born to us.

This Savior, first of all, is the Word made flesh. **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** That word “Word” is a theological goldmine of a title for Jesus. Jesus is God's Word, his message, his proclamation, his announcement. Jesus embodies and personifies everything God wants to say to mankind. A word is an inner thought outwardly expressed. We would know nothing of the inner thoughts of God unless he expressed them. Well, Jesus is the expression of the inner thoughts of God.

And he is the power of God. At the very beginning of the Bible, Genesis 1:1 says, **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”** How? He spoke his Word. Now here we have the same phrase, **“In the beginning was the Word.”** Jesus is that Word; he is the creative power of God, and the message of God for mankind. **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** So not only is Jesus true God; he's also distinct from God. This is Trinity language! Throughout the Gospel of John we hear Jesus say that he comes from the Father, and that he and the Father are one. They're together and they're distinct, at the same time. And not just at Christmas, but from all eternity. The phrase **“in the beginning”** means the beginning of the universe. And Jesus is the one who created the universe. **“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”**

So here we see Jesus as the Word of God, the message of God for humanity; he is powerful and divine; he existed from all eternity; and he is the Creator. But at Christmas something very special and unexpected happens: **“The Word became flesh.”** God wrapped his message of love, his Word, his Son, in human flesh and gave us Jesus as the greatest Christmas gift we could ever receive. This is God becoming one of us. This is the maker of heaven and earth leaving heaven to come to earth and become a frail, mortal human. **“The Word became flesh.”** Flesh means death. If you have flesh, you die. That's what life is like in a sinful world. And Jesus chose flesh! He chose a life of suffering, pain, and death – from circumcision to crucifixion. **“The Word became flesh,”** for the purpose of dying in the flesh, then rising in the flesh, so that someday we would rise in the flesh and live with him, flesh and blood, body and soul, in heaven forever.

“The Word became flesh.” This is a miracle of miracles and the greatest possible expression of God's love for us. He didn't leave us to our own demise. He became one of us; he took on human flesh. We call this the incarnation, the “in-the-flesh-ness” of our human Savior. That's why in our opening hymn, “O Come All Ye Faithful,” we sang, *“Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.”* That's why in our closing hymn, “Hark the Herald Angels,” we sing, *“Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate Deity.”* Human salvation required a human Savior. So **“The Word became flesh.”** Jesus the Word, the almighty and eternal God, becomes incarnate, takes upon himself our human flesh, and is born as our perfect human Savior.

This Savior is also the life-giving light. **“In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.”** And nowhere is that more clearly seen than on two occasions: Christmas and Easter. At Christmas Jesus entered human life. And for the next thirty-three years he lived. He walked and talked, he ate and drank, he slept and felt – he lived. And then he died. His life stopped – abruptly, brutally, violently, as he hung on the cross. But then at Easter he took up his life again. You’ll recall Jesus saying, **“I have authority to lay down [my life] and authority to take it up again” (Jn 10:18).**

So, because of Christmas and Easter, because of the manger, the cross, and the empty tomb, **“In him was life”** means that Jesus is the conqueror of death, the source of life, and the giver of life. And this life, of course, includes eternal life in heaven. The most famous passage in the Bible, John 3:16, says, **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life,”** – that is, life with Jesus forever in heaven. But this life with Jesus also includes a life of faith, connected to Jesus by grace, here on earth. Again, recall Jesus saying, **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (Jn 10:10); and “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12).** In Jesus light and life are interconnected. To walk in Jesus’ light means to have true life.

And so, **“In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”** The good news of Jesus shines through the darkness of this world. And there is so much darkness in the world – hatred, violence, cruelty, death, despair, depression, sadness, sin. And you don’t have to look very far to find this darkness. It’s not just out there; it’s in here. The darkness is in my heart, and it’s in your heart. And the source of this darkness is sin. But the good news of Jesus shines through the darkness and cannot be overcome by the darkness. **“The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”** And my friends, that light is shining, right now! It’s shining in the manger; it’s shining in the arms of Mary; it’s shining on the cross; it’s shining in the empty tomb; it’s shining in heaven; it’s shining in Word and worship; it’s shining in Baptism and Communion. It’s shining on us and giving us life. Jesus said, **“Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”** And **“that life was the light of all mankind.”** The Savior born for us is the life-giving light.

And finally, this Savior is also the with-us God. **“He was in the world.” “He came to that which was his own”** – which is astounding because not only did Jesus create the world, but it’s the “world” and “his own” that rejected and crucified him. **“Though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.” “His own did not receive him.”** Jesus was not welcomed! His people wanted nothing to do with him, and even as a baby he was hunted down to be killed. So much for a royal welcome!

Nevertheless, **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”** In the Old Testament, God had a special way of dwelling among his people. He would take the form of a bright, fiery cloud. And on special occasions, that could would fill the tent of meeting, and later the tabernacle, and later the temple. It was a powerful, visual display of the Lord’s glory and presence dwelling among his people.

Today we don’t need a bright, fiery cloud to show us the Lord’s glory and presence, because we have Jesus, the with-us God, dwelling among us. **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son.”** God chooses to dwell among us in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the glory of the Lord. In the manger he may look less impressive than a smoke-filled tabernacle or a consuming fire on Mt. Sinai. But when you look closely, you can see the glory. You can see the glory at his baptism in the Jordan River; shining on the mount of transfiguration; raising Lazarus and Jairus’s daughter; riding a donkey into Jerusalem; bleeding on the cross; showing his disciples his hands and side; ascending into heaven. This is the glory of the with-us God. And I promise you – no Jesus promises you – that you will see his glory, in its fullness, in heaven, because Jesus has come to be with us. He is Immanuel, God with us. He came to dwell among us, here on earth; and now he dwells in our hearts by faith. In your heart! John chapter one is talking about you when it says, **“To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”** The birth of the Son of God makes you sons and daughters of God, children of the heavenly Father, brothers and sisters to your newborn Brother Jesus, **“who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

Which is the real meaning of Christmas – not the decorations or the dinners, not the gatherings or the gifts, but grace and truth – God’s grace in sending Jesus to be our Savior, and the truth that this Savior born to us is the Word made flesh and the life-giving light and the with-us God. Happy Christmas!