

Scriptures: Psalm 98; Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-12; John 1:1-14

Jesus Born Into the Human Family

Merry Christmas, New Hope Church family! We're blessed to be able to come together here on one of the holiest days of the year – to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, in the stable in Bethlehem. I know we changed the start time slightly – though I can recall a time 20 years ago or so, when every Sunday morning service started here at 10:00! Some churches in our area – and in the surrounding counties – are closed this morning, to give people time with their families. One would think celebrating the greatest thing that's ever happened in the history of the world would be something that families would want to do in their faith communities.

It's an indicator of how unimportant our world, and the wider society, views the miracle of Christ coming at Christmas. Most people in America claim to be Christian, but they're what some of my friends from my stint at Botkins called "CEI" Christians – "Christmas, Easter, In Need of Prayer" – because that's the only time they show up in church. Don't misunderstand this – I think there are a lot of good, unchurched Christians who love and follow Jesus Christ – but they'd be even better if they were plugged into a Bible-believing, Jesus Christ proclaiming community of faith on a regular basis. Because of the lackadaisical view of our society towards worshiping together, the Bible is misunderstood by many people.

In our Gospel lesson this morning, written by John, the Apostle "whom Jesus loved," he makes it very clear that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who comes to the manger in Bethlehem at Christmas, has always been. The big take away for us is that while Jesus was born into the human family on Christmas morning, He has always existed from before the Creation, and will exist beyond the end of eternity, if that could ever be reached. A lot of people in America today don't understand this. They view the birth of Jesus as "safe." It's safe to worship a baby. But let's not focus on the cross, the empty tomb, and the call by Him to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Welcome to Our World

St. John makes it very clear to us. He writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning," (Jn. 1:1-2). Of course, "the Word," and the "He" John is referring to is our Savior, Jesus Christ. John goes on, "Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made," (verse 3). In other words, way back in Genesis when we read that God says, "Let there be light," (Gen. 1:3), and all the other things He created – that's Jesus. Jesus was the spoken Word. He was the audible – the hearable – Voice speaking the universe into existence.

So Jesus has always been around. He's always existed, because He's God. "In Him was Life, and that life was the light of men," (Jn. 1:4), I hope you know that this morning, church! In Him is life – He gives us life – and He's our light! "The Light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it," (verse 5). The world still doesn't understand the tremendous price Almighty God willingly paid to restore right relationships between Him and us, and others. I want you to listen to this Christmas song, *Welcome to Our World*, and really listen to the words. (Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrgwL5r7lcU>)

In the middle of the Apostle's Christmas narrative, he adds a couple verses about Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist. The Apostle writes, "There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that Light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the Light; he came only as a witness to the Light," (verses 6-8). John the Baptist would end up dying in prison at the hands of Herod Antipas, for criticizing him for the immoral lifestyle Herod was living. Yet Jesus said this of His cousin, John, "Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he," (Matt. 11:11).

Jesus is the Light of the World

On this Christmas morning, that's very comforting, friends. Because through the death of Jesus Christ on Good Friday's cross, He's adopted us into God's family. He makes us co-heirs with Him, and gives us citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. You and I are also called to be witnesses to the Light. "The True Light that gives light to every person was coming into the world," (Jn. 1:9), that's Jesus Christ! He's the Light of the world.

If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times – the world hasn't changed much since that first Christmas in Bethlehem so long ago. "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," (verses 10-11). So often we make Jesus out to be Someone exactly like us. He's not – God-with-us, despite being human, is remarkably different than the ordinary John Doe on the street.

The Church, especially in America, has been guilty of pigeon-holing Jesus Christ into a White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant male image, when in reality, He's none of those things. I know, He's male – but His masculinity recorded in Holy Scripture is in sharp contrast to our concept of masculinity. He cries at the death of His friend, Lazarus. If a guy cries today, people look at them like their soft in the head. Over and over, we see Him interacting with the weak, the marginalized, the unwanted – but we would rather be popular, and part of the "in" crowd.

Adopted Into God's Family

It's no wonder the whole world doesn't yet know Him – the Church, in general, has been sleeping. Look at the promise He gives us though. "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," (verses 12-13). And that's Good News, friends! That's the best news the world has ever – or in some cases, has not yet – heard!

Prior to the birth of Jesus Christ at Bethlehem on that first Christmas long ago, the world hadn't heard a word from Almighty God in over four hundred years. Jesus came into the darkness, into a world yearning to know its Creator. "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," (verse 14). New Hope, that's the gift of Christmas – God being born in human skin – to love us even to the point of death on the cross! And today, He calls us still – through His Holy Spirit – to make Him known throughout the world!

Prayer: Father God, You spoke and Your Word became flesh, breathing a new song of joy and praise into our world. Grant that we may bear the Good News of Your salvation, proclaiming Your promises of peace, reconciliation, and restoration to the ends of the earth. Amen.