

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.² He was with God in the beginning.³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men.⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.⁶ There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John.⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.¹⁴ 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. (John 1:1-14)

The True Miracle of Christmas

Which Christmas specials did you watch this year? Have you ever noticed how they all have a Christmas miracle? Whether it's the town's people bringing money to save George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*, or Susan getting her dream house and a new dad in *Miracle on 34th Street*, or just Rudolf with his nose so bright, guiding Santa's sleigh that night, always there's a miracle. A family is restored or a friendship is saved or a poor person has a Christmas after all. Why do you think that a Christmas miracle is such a stand-by of Christmas specials and even of Christmas episodes of regular TV shows? Don't you think it's because Christmas really is about a miracle? Our society may have lost sight of the true miracle of Christmas, but it's still there. It's there in all the hymns and Christmas Carols. It's there when Linus tells Charlie Brown the true meaning of Christmas and recites Luke chapter 2. It's there in the gospel lesson that we have before us today. None of those fictional miracles even comes close to **the true miracle of Christmas**.

I.

The true miracle of Christmas is that the Word was made flesh. God inspired the Apostle John to give us the ultimate description of that miracle in our gospel lesson. If you look at the lesson as it's printed in the bulletin today, you may notice that there are no big, scary theological words. Even in Greek, John's language and his grammar are simple and clear. But in these fourteen verses, God says things that we will wrestle with and ponder for the rest of our lives. He describes the greatest miracle of all time, greater even than the creation itself.

God became man. That's what John is talking about. He starts with the second greatest miracle of all, creation. He says, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."** "The Word" here in this verse means Jesus. Verse 14 says, **"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."** That shows us that we're talking about Jesus. "The Word" is Jesus before he took that name. The Son of God took the name Jesus when he entered the womb of the Virgin Mary. That happened at a specific moment roughly two thousand years ago. But for ages before that moment – really for forever before that moment – the Son of God existed. John says that he was there "in the beginning." At the moment that God began to create the universe, at the moment that God invented time and started all clocks running, the Son of God was already there.

That Word, the Son of God in eternity, was both "with God" and he "was God." Now, what does that mean? John is talking about the Trinity. The Son of God was with God the Father. He was there "at the Father's side" as John says a little later. And he was God himself. Not a god, not one of many gods or even one of two or three gods. He was the one and only God. We worship one God in three persons. That truth helps to understand why God calls his Son "the Word" here. What do we do with words? We communicate with them. God communicates himself to us through his Son. We cannot truly know God or his love until we know Jesus.

John says, **"Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."** Most of the time, the Bible says that God the Father is the Creator. Yet, by the mystery of the Trinity,

Jesus also made the world. Nothing that exists was made without him. That is what makes his coming into the world an even greater miracle than the creation itself. Certainly, when God started time where there had never been time before, and then he said, "Let there be light," that was a miracle. But when God himself, in the person of his Son, became a part of the creation – not just the ruler of it, not just the one who made it and sustains it, but actually a part of it, that was an even greater miracle. My friends, if you go down to the DIA you will see some amazing works of art. Sometimes, you'll see that some artists put themselves in the paintings. That's not what the Son of God did. He didn't put a representation of himself in the creation. He didn't just visit the creation the way that God does many times in the Old Testament. And he even did more than what God does when he says that he is everywhere all the time. That was true for the Son of God as well. But in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Son of God joined his "God" nature to a real human nature and God became man. God became a part of the created world.

He didn't stop being God. But he started to be a real human being. Last week, I attended my kids' Christmas Concert up at MLS and one of the songs that one of the classes sang made me think about this reality. It spoke about how everything is new for a baby. They feel and see and discover things that they've never felt or seen or discovered before. A baby will sit and stare at something. I used to tell my wife that the camera was running because the baby doesn't really comprehend much of it. But he or she is recording sensations and impressions and as the mind develops, it slowly organizes and understands those things. By the time a child is two or three, it's gone from everything being a shock of sound and color and temperature to a world that more or less makes sense.

Jesus was a real, human baby. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us for a while. Jesus was everything that we are and the Bible says that he grew in wisdom and in stature. He was born with a newborn's brain. He developed and discovered and learned just as we do. And yet, at the very same time, he knew all things. That song made that point. That baby learning to know his own mother also was the Son of God who created that mother and knew everything that was in her heart and all that had ever happened to her and all that would ever happen to her. What a mystery! How can those things go together? I can't tell you. Only God knows. And only God knows how a baby who needed to be fed and kept warm and protected from Herod could also be the almighty Son of God. Only God knows how the Son of God could be hidden in a human body and yet still be everywhere at once. Only God could make it happen. It is the greatest miracle of all time. And God did it because he loves us.

II.

When we stand in the stable of Bethlehem, we have to look down the road to the cross. Without the cross, this becomes nothing more than a sweet little story, an opportunity for us to gush just like we do when we see any newborn baby. Christmas is about more than the miracle of birth, which really isn't a miracle at all. It happens every day in every town and village on earth. Christmas is about one great miracle, the Word becoming flesh. Then it's about another miracle that flows from that one. **The true miracle of Christmas is that God made us a part of his family.**

The story of Bethlehem is our story. On my computer, I have well over a thousand pictures of my family – when the kids were little, vacations, graduations, field trips, sports and music events. I love those pictures. Some day I plan to organize them and give a DVD to my parents and my in-laws and each of my kids. But I wouldn't bother giving you a copy. It's not that I dislike you. Rather, do you really want one? You would never even scroll through all those pictures. But for me and my wife, for our children and our parents, those pictures represent our family history. The story of Christ in the manger of Bethlehem is our family history, too – yours and mine and that of all believers. John says that those who receive Christ have the right to become children of God.

Understand what he means. John said, "**In him [in Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of men.**" But then he goes on, "**The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.**" Jesus came here to give us eternal life. There was no other way for us to get that life. John calls this world that we live in "darkness." When God created the world, he called everything "very good." What changed? Sin entered the world. Sin corrupted everything. Sin made you and me sinners. So when Christ came into the world, he came as light shining in darkness.

When I was kid, I didn't understand this image very well because I had never really experienced total darkness. At night, even after all the lights were off, I could get up and find the bathroom because street lights

still shone into our house. A couple of years ago, I had one of many adult experiences of true darkness. We were camping just north of the Mackinac Bridge and I got up at night to go to the bathroom. Even though I had a flashlight, I couldn't see anything outside of that beam. I cut through an empty campsite and ran smack into a picnic table that was invisible in the darkness.

Without Christ, there is no light in this world. Our society believes that people are basically good. It believes that we all have at least a little natural light inside us. We're flashlights and Jesus is a spotlight. But God says that we were all born as sinners with no goodness or light in us at all. We were born in total darkness and even if we wanted to find him, we would stumble around in the dark forever, tripping over the picnic tables of our sinful desires and temptations. We would never even get close to him. In the end, we would die and go to hell. That's a hard truth for us to accept. We want to believe that we're good people. But it just isn't true.

But in that hopeless reality, Jesus was born. In him was life – eternal life for us. He gave us life by living in our place. By the miracle of Christmas, God lived as a man. So he could be perfect. And he could be perfect not just for one person, but for the whole human race. The human life of the Son of God is worth more than all our sinful lives put together. And the death of the Son of God – and the hell he suffered on the cross – paid for all the pride and sin that all people were born with. It paid for the part of us that insists that we are good people no matter what God says. It paid for the sinner inside that leads us to do and think and say and feel what we want instead of what God wants – and does that over and over again. Jesus died and he paid for all that sin. Then he rose and wiped that sin away. In him was life.

And that life was the light of men. What Jesus did is the gospel. That message is the only way to heaven. Jesus came and he shone in the darkness. The darkness didn't understand him. The Greek word that John uses here means both to understand and to conquer. The light keeps shining. And in that light the Holy Spirit works. He enters our hearts through the message and he makes us his. John says that all who receive that message – all who believe – are children of God. We've been adopted into the family of God himself. When we were living in Colombia, several times we met Americans who came down there to adopt babies. They would take orphans or abandoned children and bring them into their own families. They would spend thousands of dollars so that they could take those children home and love them and then spend thousands of dollars more raising them and educating them. They did that for babies that they didn't know or owe anything to. There weren't the kids of their own relatives. They were strangers that they never would've met if they hadn't gone there to adopt them.

That's what God did for us. He owed us nothing. But he loved us and he sent that message of Christ to give us faith. Now we are a part of his family. We will live and reign with him forever. That's a miracle that only God could do. And it all began on Christmas. The true miracle of Christmas is really one miracle with two parts: God enters our world and becomes one of us. And he brings us into his world to live with him forever. Celebrate that gift today and every day! Amen.