

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)

Have You Seen his Glory?

Have you ever had first time parents show you the nursery they've been working on? They buy a crib and a rocking chair, a changing table and decorations and maybe they do a special paint job. They want it to be just right when the new baby comes. Even if they can't afford a really fancy set up, they try to make the new baby's space as nice as their budget will allow. So if you get to stand in that nursery and look at the new baby sleeping there, the whole atmosphere is one of love and warmth and hope. But imagine if you were an aid worker in Aleppo. What do you think nurseries look like there? What do you think you might see when you walked into a space where new parents were trying to provide for a new baby? It might bring tears to your eyes. Which image do you think was closer to the stable where Jesus was born? We don't want to overdo it. Jesus wasn't born in a war zone. You probably shouldn't think of him being born on winter's day in a stable out behind a farm house. At the time of Christ, Jewish homes and barns were usually the same building. But he was born in the stable part. He was laid in a manger because there wasn't room for Mary and Joseph anywhere else. The circumstances were remarkable enough that the angel could direct the shepherds to look for a baby in a manger and know they would find the only one.

How does that jibe with our image of the baby in the manger? Don't we have an almost cute picture in our minds? Think of our manger scenes and Christmas cards. Have we sanitized or romanticized what must have been a very earthy, humble, even unpleasant situation? What was it really like? I'm not sure we can really say today. But we can answer a far more important question: what does it mean? In our gospel lesson for this morning, the Apostle John tells us. He says, "**We have seen his glory.**" My friends, as we gather on this Christmas morning, is that true about us? **Have you seen his glory?**

I.

Obviously, none of us got to visit that baby in the stable. Neither did John. When he says "we have seen his glory," he's probably thinking of the time when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain and showed him and Peter and James his glory. He may also have had in mind all the miracles Jesus did. Because John was an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry and apparently the only disciple to watch him die, because he was one of the two who ran to Jesus' tomb and saw it was empty and then saw the risen Christ that very night, he was a witness to Jesus' glory in a way that you and I can't be, at least not yet. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the "we" here can include you and me and every Christian who will ever live. We hear these accounts in church. We read them in our Bibles. Through the eyes of faith, we do see that baby in the manger and that man on the cross and that resurrected Lord. Every time we see him do a miracle, every time the Bible tells us what was hidden behind that baby's flesh, we do see God's glory in a subtle and yet amazing way. **Have you seen the glory of the Creator made flesh?**

By faith, you have. That's what John shows us this morning. He begins his gospel before time began. John wrote, "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.**" When everything started, when God invented time itself, Jesus was already

there. John calls him the Word because strictly speaking, no one ever called him “Jesus” until he was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. “Jesus” is his human name, the name he took when he entered this world. But the Son of God existed long before that happened. The Word is the Son of God in heaven before Bethlehem, before the angel came to Mary in Nazareth, before the power of the Most High overshadowed her. John chose to call him “the Word” because when he came, Jesus showed us the true love of the Father. The Bible teaches us that if we want to know God, we must know Jesus. He communicates God to us, so he is “the Word.”

Jesus was with God and he was God. What does that mean? “With God” means that he was with God the Father. We’re talking about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit here, right? Each one is a separate person who can’t be mixed or confused with the others. Yet, “the Word was God.” Jesus is true God just as much as the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is the one and only God with them. That three and one business is one of the hardest things about our faith. Yet, it is what God says. We confess it and believe it, even though we can’t really explain it.

John tells us, **“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”** Yet at the same time, he says, **“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”** The Greek word translated as “he made his dwelling among us” could be very literally translated as “he tented among us.” St. Paul speaks of you and me putting on and taking off the tent of our bodies. The Son of God put on human flesh. He had a body and soul, just like we do. He had a mind and a heart and a human will just like we do. So he was God and he was man and he was just one person.

All that is mindboggling. But John doesn’t speculate about it. He doesn’t try to come up with technical terms and descriptions like generations of Christians have done. He just tells us it happened. And then he focuses on the irony of it: **“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.”** You would think that the world would recognize its maker, but it didn’t. You know how angry people got when Jesus claimed to be God. You know that Jesus came to the people that God had claimed for his own, and that people by and large rejected Jesus outright.

Jesus knew that was going to happen. He knew how many people would reject him then and now. But the Son of God put on human flesh and came anyway. John says that he gave power to all those who did receive him – to all those who believed in his work and his message. He gave the power to become the children of God. Jesus gave us a right. He adopted us into God’s family. Now, we aren’t strangers putting our faces up to the glass looking in. Now, we’re children, welcomed into the family. Many people consider Christmas to be “family time” and I hope you have the chance to be with your family today. But understand, because Jesus came, you are with your family when you’re here. You’re with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Most important of all, you’re with your Father and your older Brother Jesus. You are a part of the eternal family of God, something that will be yours forever.

That is the glory that we see in the manger today: the Son of God was willing to do all those things. The Son of God was willing to put on human flesh and shiver in the cold of Judean night in a stable without central heating. The Son of God was willing to be helpless and cared for, to grow in wisdom and stature, to follow the path that led through pain and sorrow and death so that we will live. What can we call that willingness to do all those things? Don’t we have to call it love? And is there any greater glory than the glory of love?

II.

Of course, glory that’s hard to see doesn’t really seem like glory to us. We tend to associate glory with something spectacular. When we want to celebrate things that we think are glorious, we shoot off fireworks or shine spotlights on them. When the northern lights are visible, people use words like “glorious” to describe them. Light and glory go together. The Bible makes that connection, too. In the book of Revelation, Jesus’ face shines like the sun. At the end of Revelation, John says that the new Jerusalem doesn’t need the sun or the moon because the Lord gives that city light. So today, John says that when Christ came, light came into this world. **Have you seen the glory of the light of the world?**

John said, **“The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”** What is the darkness? That’s this world and all its sin. God made the world to be light, but Adam and Eve rebelled against him and plunged our world into darkness. Jesus often calls hell “the outer darkness.” What is it like to be trapped in darkness? It would be scary, right? Children are often afraid of the dark. But don’t we adults have to admit

that we are, too? Have you ever heard a noise in your house at night and suddenly been wide awake? Have you ever gone downstairs to see what it was? How did you feel? Scared, right? We live in the darkness of sin. Until the light comes, it's natural to be afraid – afraid of every pain and loss that can come. But even more than that, afraid of God and his judgment, afraid of what our sins deserve, afraid of what they will do to us here and in the life to come. How many of us Christians still fear the consequences of our sinful choices here, even though we have forgiveness and light?

To be in the darkness is also to be lost. Everything looks different at night. I've noticed from having teenage drivers that at night, it's harder for them to get their bearings. If you go out into the woods at night, it might be morning before you can figure out where you are. Spiritually speaking, to be in darkness means to be lost forever, with no hope of ever finding your way back to God. Finally, don't we associate darkness with evil? Jesus is the light, but the devil is pure darkness. The light came to be a cure for all that. He came to light up the way to heaven. He came to drive away our fear and take away our sin. He came to give us life and light with him and free us from the evil that ruled our hearts when we were born.

When John said "the darkness has not understood the light," he used a word that most translations render as "it has not *overcome* the light." Think how hard the devil tried to defeat Jesus. Think of the temptations. Think of Herod slaughtering babies trying to murder the infant Christ. Think of Jesus' enemies arguing with him and persecuting his followers and finally nailing him to a cross. Think of them taunting him while he hung there. They lost. Jesus won even when he died. Jesus won from the moment he was born. His victory is our victory. He is the true light that won eternal life for us.

You know, when people draw or paint pictures of Christmas, they almost can't help but paint or draw light coming from Jesus. Sometimes, they actually put a halo around his head. Sometimes, they make light radiate out from the manger. Well, there were no halos in Bethlehem and the only light in the stable would have come from oil lamps. Yet, there is light that streams from the manger to us: the light of the gospel, the light of the true glory of Christ, which is the glory of God coming to rescue us. That light gives us life because in Christ all our sin is gone and we are holy in God's sight. One day, that light will return, physically to this world, and drive all the darkness of sin away. And we will dwell in its radiance forever.

My friends, see the glory of Christ on this Christmas morn! Amen.