

First Sunday after Christmas - B (2025)

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalm 147

Galatians 3:23-25, 4:4-7

John 1:1-18

‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us.’ In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today marks the fourth day of the season of Christmastide, also known as the Twelve Days of Christmas. It is the very short liturgical season of celebration of the birth of Emmanuel, God-with-us. I recognize it’s just the first Sunday after Christmas but am pleasantly surprised to see so many Christmas trees still ablaze with colored lights in the homes of our neighbors and Christmas wreaths still adorning their front doors. I am pleased not to have seen a discarded Christmas tree propped up along the garbage can waiting for the garbage truck to come along. I am very grateful that our home is still decorated, and my hope remains so through the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6th. A bonus is that Julie and I have been able to celebrate with many of the extended family of our two sons, a gift indeed.

Christmastide allows me to more fully appreciate the Christmas carols of old sung by the likes of King’s College – Cambridge, Bing Crosby, and Nat King Cole that have wafted through the house over the past several weeks. It’s also a time of watching numerous taped Christmas-themed shows such as It’s a Wonderful Life, White Christmas, and The Christmas Candle. I hope that these past days have been ones of enjoyment and celebration and not ones laced with the letdown of, yet another Christmas day come-and-gone, as if it is just another day on the calendar. Even amid trials and disappointment, Christmas comes and brings with it the hope and opportunity for new beginnings as the greatest gift-of-all-gifts, the light that shines through all our darkest days and times has arrived, and its glow helps put the days of struggle in perspective.

I hope you have noticed here at church that the Magi have not yet arrived at the manger scene, their presence representing the manifestation of Christ to the Gentile world. We found out last week where they have been these past handful of weeks and I was glad to know they were safe. They will arrive the Tuesday after next, the Feast of Epiphany, and I'm hoping those folks who are responsible for the putting up and taking down of our Christmas decorations will be kind enough to retain our nativity tableau until then as we follow the celebration of this feast day over the next six Sundays, the Sundays *after* (the) Epiphany, which lead us to Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent.

A beauty of the Gospel accounts is each evangelist offers his unique insight to the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Mark begins his gospel with Jesus as an adult and being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan after which a voice from heaven pronounced, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased. While Matthew begins his gospel with a long genealogy of Jesus, he also includes a short birth narrative that features Joseph following the directions delivered by an angel in his dreams which preceded Mary giving birth and Joseph naming the child Jesus. Luke begins his gospel with the story of the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah, followed by another annunciation story, this one to Mary foretelling the birth of Jesus, one who will be great and called Son of the Most High. Luke's birth narrative includes the famous decree of Caesar Augustus that all were to be registered in their hometowns. Luke's story continues with the birth of Jesus, the Son of God wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. He highlights the telling of Jesus' birth to the shepherds and the multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those whom he is pleased."

Today we hear of John's poetic announcement of the cosmic arrival of the 'Word' that is both sublime and deeply specific: Paraphrasing the ESV Study Bible, John places Jesus' existence in eternity past with God, the one-of-a-kind Son of the Father *who is himself God*. No shepherds or angels, no manger, no Mary and Joseph. John's inspired writing reaches back to before the beginning was the beginning, that the Word was the source of all that was and will be, the originating force behind all the created order. John makes it clear: and the Word *was* God.

John's audacious message of both testaments is that the God of the universe revealed himself to humanity. This universe-creating God is both transcendent and immanent, supreme yet knowable.

John continues that despite the Word's breathing the world into existence, this same world did not know him nor accept him. But to those who did respond to his message, who believed in him, to them he granted the power to become forever deeply ingrained in their relationship with him that they became his children. The Word was so in love with his creation that he willingly took on the flesh of humanity to reveal who God is and how God desires his creation to live and flourish. He opted of his own will to join humanity directly on this journey to sanctification and salvation. The Word Was God who dwelt among his people in the person of Jesus to point all of humanity to the one true God, the God whom the heavens declare his glory and to whom we are to offer our praise and worship in both word and deed; in spirit and in truth. The Word becoming flesh affirms just how much God loves and values humanity's goodness. The Word taking on the flesh of humanity allows us, through his own self-revelation, to see God himself. John writes later in his Gospel that Jesus, talking to Philip says, "whoever has seen me has seen the Father." He has made himself known in creation, in and through other people, by his providence, by his grace and mercy, and by the Word becoming flesh.

In and through our worship this morning we profess and honor the 'Oneness', majesty, and all-knowing creative power of the divine Trinity. We declare that Almighty God knows our deepest desires and from whom we can keep no secrets. We pray for the desire and ability, through Christ, to love and magnify his holy Name. We profess that God is the Holy One, that he alone is God. We confess that we believe in One God, the maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We affirm that he came down from heaven to reveal himself to his people and to offer them the life-giving eternal gift of salvation. We seek to experience his divine unity with the Son and Spirit as we partake of the sacraments and offer our prayers of thanksgiving and expressions of praise in both word and song.

Dear friends, there is so, so much to unpack in these eighteen verses that make up the prologue to John's Gospel. We will spend the next six Sundays after Epiphany

exploring what God, through Jesus, has done to make himself known through the events and people that revealed his divine authority and ultimate sovereignty. Yes, Jesus performed miracles, was an amazing teacher and a moral exemplar beyond comparison. But this isn't the whole story that many want to attribute to Jesus, maybe even some who call themselves Christians. The truth was, is, and will be for eternity that he is God. As our relationships continue to grow and mature with him, we will begin to better comprehend the seemingly unfathomable gift of his suffering and death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of souls of all who believe. This is why John wrote his gospel: "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in his name." Can any of us really get our heads wrapped around that?

This 'dwelling among us' is not just a historical event set in Bethlehem, it is a continuing reality at this very moment. As we study, worship, pray, fellowship, and serve others in his name, we will grow in the knowledge and love of God. Our willingness to let him rule, direct, and govern our lives as children of his will result in the joy and peace that passes all understanding, right here, right now. We will experience the joyful and abundant life that he has promised. And the Word became flesh and *dwells* among us. Wow!

