John 1:1-5,10-14 (esp.14); Isaiah 52:7-10; 1 John 1:1-9 12/24/20

**The Word Became Flesh (Help Has Arrived)**

Christmas is such a joy. And what joy is added when Christmas morning dawns with snow on the ground! Ok, it’s not that much snow, but hey, it’s something! To me, snow on this holy morning is like God giving an extra approval to the celebration of the Christ-child.

And then we go to church. Some went on Christmas Eve. Others today. Some, both. In at least a few minds, not all, but at least a few, is the question, “We do this every year. I know this. I know it by heart. Why?”

*There,* in that question is a challenge to our Christian faith. Actually it is more than a challenge. It is a danger with cliffs on both sides.

On the one side is the danger of formalism where we do things for no other reason than, “This is the way we do things.” We go to church on Christmas because we go to church on Christmas, don’t ’cha know! People fell into formalism in Jesus’ day too—not about Christmas, but about other religious matters.) When going through the motions of doing what God told them to do, they could always say: “God told us to do it. God told us to do it this way.” Jesus watched and said, *“These people worship me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”*

The opposite challenge—pardon me—the opposite danger is novelty. Instead of doing things the way we have always done them because that is how we have always done them, we do new things for no other reason than that they are new things. Anything old, we rail against for no reason other than that it is old and we are bored.

Not long ago our family watched a movie from 1936. Excellent movie. We really enjoyed it. But at many points it was intensely interesting to see just how much life had changed just in the time since films have been made! Surely, when life changes that much, of what use are the old ways?

Novelty tells us to drop the old and move on to something else for no other reason than the love of new things. Formalism tells us to keep on for no other reason than that this is what we have always done.

Jesus pronounced the solution when he said, *“Every [good] teacher… is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”* Welcome the new, while not letting go of the old. Let our Christmas worship do the same.

In this reading from the Gospel of John it’s almost like God’s Word is trying to shake us awake about something we have seen so often that we have forgotten what it means. That thing being, the arrival of the Savior.

Do you remember about two years ago there was a youth soccer team in Thailand trapped in a cave? For over a week they were trapped in absolute darkness. Then one day, when hope must have nearly been gone—maybe it was gone—a diver popped up in the pool in the cave. I cannot, I positively *cannot* imagine the joy they felt. I mean, in a little way I can, but only partly. We can’t really feel what they felt, not because we are unfeeling brutes, but because we haven’t fully experienced the fear to fully know the relief.

But you have had rescues in your life, haven’t you? Sure, your rescues have been smaller. But you have had them.

Remember the time you were stuck in the ditch on a snowy day far from home, and a stranger pulled up in pickup truck with a tow chain and pulled you out of the ditch? That relief was visceral. And strange to say, it is a relief that is greater than the cave rescue—at least in our personal experience—because you lived through it. Your experience of that small rescue is, at least in your memory, greater than your experience of someone else’s huge rescue. To prove the point, consider this: Half a lifetime later you vividly remember the man droving up in the pickup truck, but after two years you have almost forgotten about that cave rescue.

Which is what happens when we think, “Do I have to go to another Christmas service?” We know Jesus is *the* Savior, but we have forgotten that he is *our* Savior.

I have forgotten the sin and guilt I was born into. I have forgotten that I deserve eternal punishiment in hell for my past and current rebellions. I have forgotten that the confidence I have now of acceptance by God hinges entirely on Jesus. I have forgotten that the reason I can be sure that God guides and guards me for my good in years good and bad is wrapped up in my Savior.

John would amplify our joy by having us pause and consider just who our rescuer is. In presenting our rescuer, our Savior, you might expect the Gospel of John to tell us the familiar Christmas story we heard last night. But he doesn’t. What we call The Christmas Story is boiled down to four words in the Gospel of John, ***“The Word became flesh.”***

***“The Word…”*** That’s weird. Why not call him Jesus? Well, because Jesus is the name that was given to the child born to Mary in about 4BC in the town of Bethlehem. But this one, born as the child Jesus, he actually existed (I can’t really use the word “lived”) existed long before that. Since “Jesus” was a name given in time, John calls him The Word, to tell us that Jesus is more than just another human being. For our purposes, it is not so important why he is called The Word. The point is that it is not a name. The Christ-child is something much more than a human being like you or me.

Verse one tells us three things about who that child really is. ***“In the beginning was the Word.”*** The one who became flesh existed in the beginning. Not the beginning of this story, but the beginning of the universe. When the created order came into being, this one was already there.

***“And the Word was with God.”*** This points out that the Word was with God the Father in the beginning, and yet also distinct from the Father. They are not the same, but separate.

***“And the Word was God.”*** Even though the Word is distinct, he is still God. Not that there are two Gods—John will make that clear in later chapters—the Word is the one true God, but not God the Father.

Which raises all kinds of questions about how the Word and the Father can be separate and yet One. Add to that that a few verses after our reading John introduces the Holy Spirit. This is a great mystery. For the first 300 years Christians wrestled and grappled and sometimes argued and worse about how to explain who this three-in-one God is—which we of course can’t fit in the space between these ears—and finally they summarized it in a newly minted word: Trinity. It means that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three persons and One God. “Trinity” is our human attempt to summarize what the Bible tells us about the three-in-one God. Some will tell you that the word Trinity is not found in the Bible. True. Why do that?

I think of it like a kindergarten assignment a certain boy come home with. The assignment was that he learn how to tie his shoes. His mom sat him down and showed him time after time after time how to tie his shoes, and he just couldn’t. Which isn’t exactly right because he could tie them, but it was the wrong way. After an hour an exasperated mother said, “That’s the best we can do. Your teacher is just going to have to be happy with that.” And that’s kind of like the word Trinity. It doesn’t adequately describe the three-in-one God we worship, but for us limited humans it’ll have to do.

The second person of that Trinity is who ***“became flesh.”*** The eternal God clothed himself in our skin. God jumped into our existence. He popped his head out of the pool in the cave of death our sins had brought us. He drove up in the the pick-up truck and dragged us out of the ditch we were trapped in. He saw us lying on the ground and gave us CPR. Whatever the rescue story of your life is, that relief that you felt, not through a television or cellphone screen, but in your own physical being, that feeling of rescue is what we feel this morning when we peek into the cradle and see “The Word made flesh.” Our Savior. My Savior! Our God!

He apperaed as ***“the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”***

What it means that he appeared full of grace and truth will be unraveled in the coming weeks of the church year. On Christmas, the rescuer has only just arrived on the scene! There will be time learn what it means that he comes ***“full of grace and truth.”*** But for today, we just celebrate. We just rejoice that our Savior, our rescuer has arrived. Amen.