

Messiah Moravian Church (Virtual Sermon)  
Second Sunday after Christmas Day  
January 3, 2021  
Text: John 1: 10-18  
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## JOHN'S CHRISTMAS STORY

According to the church calendar there are only three days left during this Christmas season. So I suppose it is appropriate that today's lectionary reading contains the shortest Christmas narrative of all the Gospels. John's version in verse 14 is only nine words long: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us..." That's it—John's Christmas story. There are no parents traveling to Bethlehem, no baby lying in a manger, no angels or shepherds, no star or Magi.

John does not give us a historical account of Christmas because he wants to give us a confession of faith about the incarnation of God. He is not concerned about exactly what happened in Bethlehem during the reign of King Herod. He is much more focused on the incarnation of the cosmic Christ and the difference that birth makes for all of us.

Many scholars believe that these opening verses of John are quotations from earlier Christian hymns. The passage contains similar themes to other first century scriptural hymns, such as those found in Philippians 2 and Colossians 1. Like John's prologue, these early Christological hymns stress the pre-existence of Christ. They extol Christ's death and future glory. They describe an almighty God who created everything that exists, who is far beyond our understanding and yet who comes to earth as a human being in human flesh.

By highlighting the significance of the Incarnation, John emphasizes Jesus's birth as the ultimate proof of God's love for us and reveals God's adoption of us as his beloved children. Verse 12 declares: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God..."

Jesus came that we might become children of God, children who are not dominated by the circumstances in which we find ourselves, not defined by our limitations or hurts, and whose destinies are not controlled by others. Rather, we are those individuals who know ourselves to be God's own beloved children.

Jesus was born, lived, died, and raised again not simply to pay some "penalty for sin" but rather to confirm that God loves us more than we can fathom. And for John, that assurance makes all the difference to the world.

The Incarnation helps us grasp and claim our nature as children of God. Perhaps no one understood this better than Athanasius, archbishop of Alexandria in the fourth century. He was the great defender of the faith at a time when battles over doctrine were fought not only among theologians but also in the streets and at the imperial court. During the volatile ecclesiastical controversies of the era, Athanasius was exiled at least six times for his opinions. In his work *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, he articulated what has come to be known as the orthodox understanding of the incarnation: “The Son was made [human] that we might be made God.”

That direct quote may seem heretical to us. We tend to think of God and ourselves as separated by a vast chasm, and indeed we are. But Athanasius’s point is the Incarnation became a bridge across that chasm, offering us a way of becoming “improved versions” of ourselves.

It isn’t only that God has become flesh, as significant as that is. It isn’t only about God in flesh offering Godself to us. It isn’t only that in the Incarnation, we are reminded that all of creation is of God. The Incarnation also teaches us what it *can* mean to be human.

Often we think of Jesus as completely unlike ourselves—as some sort of superman, perhaps, or as someone who was not human in the way we are, with our petty faults and weaknesses. But that’s precisely the heretical way to look at it. The incarnation of Christ asserts that, indeed, Jesus was one of us. He was born a baby, grew and matured; he had the same struggles, difficulties, emotions that we have; he wept and got angry. And the miracle of the Incarnation is not simply that Christ became human; it is that he became human exactly like us

What Athanasius was trying to say is, Jesus showed us how to be human in a new way. We are tempted every day to lead lives dominated by fear and smallness, to stroke our egos or strive for fame and fortune, to hurt friends and family in little and, sometimes, in big ways.

The Incarnation offers us a better way. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. Jesus became human to show us, by his love, how to love one another. In his life and death, Jesus demonstrated to us and to the world the nature and power of love incarnate. He showed us human life transformed *by* love and *for* love. The Incarnation asks us to accept our adoption as children of God and thus to love ourselves and others as God loves us, to love as God showed love in Jesus Christ, so that, as 2 Peter 1:4 says, “you may become partakers of the divine nature,” a divine nature defined by radical love.

Word became flesh, our flesh, and so we are never alone, not ever. Not the 90-year-old in skilled nursing facing the end of her days; not the struggling parents of demanding children, fresh out of resources and ideas; not a young adult unsure of her life’s purpose and unsure of where to turn; not a downsized, middle-aged executive suddenly without financial moorings; not a newly retired teacher, doctor, salesperson, missing the work and community that has defined her live for the past 40 years; not you or me, facing whatever difficulties confront us.

Word became flesh. We are beloved children of God. And so, we are not alone, not ever.

### **CLOSING PRAYER:**

Inspiring Word,

calm the chaos within us and call forth form and order, that  
we may know you in our shaping, and in the shaping, surrender  
our lives to yours.

Illuminating Word,

pierce the darkness within us and call forth insight and understanding, that we  
may know you in our seeing,  
and in seeing, follow the way of your kingdom

Incarnate Word,

breathe new life within us and call forth passion and purpose, that  
we may know you in our living, and in living, embody you for the  
world. Amen

### **BENEDICTION:**

May we go into the world refreshed in hope,  
Awake, alert, attuned to God's presence,  
And ready to join his work of blessings for all. Amen