

THE CHRISTMAS EXPERIENCE – BACK TO THE BASICS

1 John 1:1-4

December 25, 2022

When the Advent season and Christmas come around every year – we think about the passages in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke that give the account of Jesus’ birth. So naturally, we want to hear about the angels, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men. However, the passage I have chosen for us this Christmas morning was written around 85AD, years after Jesus’ birth, death, resurrection, and His ascension back to His Heavenly Father, where He currently sits at the right hand of God. The passage we are going to look at this morning was written by Jesus’ disciple John who has now outlived all of the other disciples, as well as Paul who wrote most to the New Testament Epistles and is now looking back to this wonderful gift God sent to us on that first Christmas. In the four verses we are looking at today, John speaks to us about what he had heard, seen and experienced firsthand – in such an intimate way that John was never the same again, and John wants each one of us to have the very same experience he had – this Christmas!

In the beginning of John’s letter – **1 John 1:1-4** – he doesn’t describe the account of Jesus’ birth; however, in these verses John gives us a wonderful explanation of what the nativity means to all of mankind. Christmas means that salvation is by grace – **YOU ARE SAVED BY GRACE ALONE THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST ALONE!** Here’s how John begins his letter, *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.”* John wrote his Gospel years earlier and he began his Gospel by calling Jesus *“the Word.”* **John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** Now, John expands on that earlier revelation by calling Jesus, *“the Word of Life.”* Years later, John writes that Jesus not only gives us eternal life, but He is eternal life, and when we connect with Him in faith and know Him in love, we have eternal life because of the incarnation – God with us!

After John describes Jesus as “*the Life*” – the next revelation by John is found in **verse 2** – John tells us, “***The life appeared***” (referring to Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, being born as a human having physical life, not coming to us as a spiritual being, but as flesh and blood, just like us) “***which was with the Father***” (the ONE who came as flesh to live among us, the ONE who lived in Heaven face-to-face with God, the Father before He set aside His divinity to take up humanity) “***and has appeared to us***” (the disciples are eyewitness that Jesus was the real deal – a real physical human who they could touch, who they ate with, talked with, and who experienced everything they experienced). One day God left His throne in Heaven and came to live among us. Christmas really happened! John along with many other eyewitnesses testify to it, their claims and evidence would stand up in any court room. This is not just a set of nice stories. It’s not a legend. Its absolutely true. And then, if Christmas didn’t happen, then what about the other recorded events in the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life. If God didn’t come to live among us and die for our sins, then we’re on our own, lost, without any hope of salvation. The Christmas carol **Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne** tells us about that glorious day when God left Heaven, became one of us and lived among us!

Now if you have decided to reject the Christian faith, believing that you can earn your way to Heaven through your good works or good lifestyle, or you decide to follow another religion that promises your eternal life through doing good works and by following a set of rules. If you hold either of these two positions, your life will not be one of grace, but one of fear and insecurity, because you will never know if you are good enough to make it into Heaven. However, because of the truth of Christmas we’re given another option – if you believe in the truth of Christmas you are saved by grace, because Jesus is the way to the Heavenly Father add there’s no other way. So, it’s critical for us to believe, in faith, that Jesus was born to a virgin in a stable and was visited by shepherds and Magi, plus believe all of the other events recorded in the four Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life, actually happened: the incarnation – God living among us, happened; the atonement – God dying on the cross paying the price for our sins, happened; and the resurrection from the dead – Christ the first to rise from the dead, happened! That’s what John confirms in **verse 1**, “***That which was from the beginning*** (what God put in place from the creation of the world, took place in time and space, and His Apostles are witnesses of what God had put in place), ***which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched.***”

And then, the Apostles not only gazed upon Jesus during His earthly life in His physical body, but also saw His resurrected glorified body as well. John is stating here that the Apostles had heard the ONE that Israel was commanded to listen to throughout the entire Old Testament, according to the ancient prayers of the Hebrews, known as the Shema: ***“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one.”*** So, in **verse 1** John confirms that the Christmas story is not a nice *“once upon a time”* fairy tale or legend we celebrate every December 25th but is absolutely true – they are eyewitnesses. Thereby, because the events of Christmas are absolutely true, the Good News of Christmas is that you can be saved and be assured eternal life by believing in the Son of God, according to **Romans 10:9**, ***“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.”*** The Christmas carol **O Holy Night** tells us about that wonderful grace that came down to earth to save us on that very special night!

The next amazing thing John tells us is that we can, along with all of the disciples that walked with Him 2000 years ago, now have fellowship with God – all because He became human like us. **Verse 3**, ***“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”*** Christmas means you can have fellowship with God. John is saying that believers can enter into the same intimate fellowship with God that the Apostles and others had who knew Jesus personally! No other world religion can declare that their god or deity took on human sorrow, pain, suffering, weakness, and vulnerability, so that He could identify with them, and experience what they experience: hate and rejection by the world, abandonment by friends, being condemned like a criminal, and then beaten, tortured, and crucified. Thereby, no other world religion has a god who can be known personally – their gods are not personal but distant. Jesus the God/man is the only mediator between us and God, who has broken down all of the barriers between us and God. Christmas means God is no longer distant, we can know Him intimately in fellowship and He helps us to live a godly life. The Apostle Peter confirms this: ***“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter: 3-4).*** Because Jesus has overcome the world – we can overcome the world. Charles Wesley wrote a Christmas hymn about this fact – because of the incarnation, we have been

reconciled back to God and now the Godhead in flesh can be seen: **Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!**

According to John Christmas also means joy – not just ordinary joy, but “*glad tidings of great joy.*” In **verse 4**, John ends this passage speaking to us about that joy, telling us that we can share in John’s joy in the Lord, “***We write this to make our joy complete.***” John is saying, “*My joy will not be complete until you have the same joy in fellowship with God that we do.*” This is the Good News of the Christmas message that we are to take out into the world and live out each day. The birth of the Christ child brings great joy and this joy that Christmas brings is not just a trickle of joy, but comes like a tidal wave or flood, like a river of joy that floods the soul. It is a fountain of happiness and contentment that revives and strengthens us no matter the circumstances of life. So, no matter what comes along, good or bad, health or sickness, birth or death, because of Christmas we can go throughout life singing and praising God about this great joy that we have received. It’s like the ballast that keeps a ship stable and upright in the water. And it’s a supernatural joy, because it’s Christ’s joy that’s flowing into us and out of us. The gift of joy has not only been given to us, but to the entire world, and we can sing about that joy through the words of Isaac Watts: **Joy to the World!**

Joy is the very heart of Christmas – how God’s unimaginable love, mercy, grace, compassion, and goodness was packed into a manger, but today, like 2000 years ago, the world still has trouble understanding it and embracing it, because God coming to live among us was not spectacular but very ordinary. The world can’t grasp a God like Jesus, and that’s why it must be believed in faith, with a child-like faith. Jesus coming to live among us was very ordinary – Jesus was not born in affluence in a palace, Jesus was not the son of a mighty king, but was born in a lowly stable to a dirt poor couple who had to flee to Egypt and live as homeless refugees until it was safe to return to Nazareth. Christ came in weakness to save not the proud and self-confident, but those who admit they are weak and insignificant – who need a Saviour. And then, the guests at Jesus birth were not the elite living in Jerusalem, but the lowest class shepherds, who were keeping sheep in the fields that surrounded the little insignificant town of Bethlehem. A town we sing about in the Christmas carol: **O Little Town of Bethlehem!**

At every point of His birth and life Jesus didn’t follow the trends of this world. As the Son of almighty God Jesus should have been treated like royalty, like a celebrity or world leader or king; however, Jesus didn’t act how royalty or

celebrates act, He was humble, and that's why the world cannot comprehend a God like Jesus, and that's why Christianity can be offensive to so many. So, we have to keep reminding ourselves that the Christian faith doesn't begin with great human achievements that bring us recognition, honours, awards and trophies; instead, the Christian faith begins with the very simple and ordinary act of humbling ourselves before almighty God, repenting of our sins, and asking Jesus to take control of our lives as we take our hands off of the wheel and let Jesus drive.

And then we need to remember that salvation is only the beginning – it's only the very first step of our Christian journey, as we allow faith and joy to grow and mature over time within us, through the very ordinary and at times mundane practices of daily obedience, reading God's Word, prayer, fasting, attending worship services, visiting shut-ins and the sick, serving the poor, the homeless, the down-and-out, and then the difficult task of depending on Christ during those times of sorrow and suffering that come along and tests our faith. And step-by-step, as we faithfully travel this journey called Christianity, we find that our faith grows, and we come closer-and-closer to that deep sense of joy and peace that floods our soul!

In closing – I pray this Christmas morning that you would allow God to continue to work in your life and through your life in the coming new year, that you would continue to grow your faith and continue to encouraging each other. We definitely need the Lord, but we also need each other as this world continues to spiral downward, challenging us to compromise our faith to live like the rest of society around us. So, to help us walk that journey of faith set before us, let us remember the lines of the third verse of the carol we just sang, **O Little Town of Bethlehem.** Let us remember to always make room for the Christ child, especially in the mundane, the ordinary, and in the busyness of life:

*How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive his still,
The dear Christ enters in.*

I'm thankful that Jesus stands at the door of our heart desiring to come in and have that intimate fellowship with us that we all long for. On this Christmas day, my prayer for each one of you is that Christ may enter your heart this day, filling you abundantly with the hope, peace, love, and joy that only Christ can bring because Jesus is the greatest gift of all time.

So, now it's up to us to go outside of our doors and proclaim this Good News to all we meet that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is born, as we are reminded in the Christmas carol: **Go, Tell It on the Mountains**