



Sermon-Based Study Guide

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Good Shepherd Church - December 25, 2011

Christmas Day

Sermon Title: The Perfect Christmas Gift

Sermon Text: John 1.1-14

I. Start It – Connecting With One Another

Have you ever tried to describe a deeply personal experience to another person? Or perhaps you can imagine the difficulty of trying to describe colors to a person who has never seen. How is it possible to convey something to another that is almost beyond description?

II. Introduction

As we have journeyed through the season of Advent we have seen how the gospel writer Luke has developed the events that echo in the words of Isaiah 64.1: "Oh that you (Lord) would rend the heavens and come down..." Luke sees that God has broken into history, the heavens have been torn open, God has come down. Most significantly, Luke records the events that unfold in the lives of Zechariah and Elizabeth - childless, barren, yet given the promise that God has torn open the heavens and is coming down and that their son, John will have a key role in the event.

After more than 400 years without a prophet in Israel, 400 years of virtual silence on the part of God, 400 years of longing for God to act and deliver Israel from oppression... Luke recounts the breakthrough moments... God is speaking through Zechariah, Elizabeth, a young woman named Mary, and an old man named Simeon (Luke 2). And through their Holy Spirit-inspired songs God speaks of a child who is to be born. A child who is to be conceived by the Holy Spirit - he is the fully human son of Mary and the fully divine Son of God. God speaks. And the "Word" that is spoken takes on human flesh and enters into the world to free all humanity from the oppression to sin, to shine the light of the glory of God into the world, to embody the loving kindness of God - that defies description - so that we can understand it and receive it.

III. Study the Context – Read John 1.1-14

- 1) In John 1.1-5 the "Word" is described. "Word" is the English translation for the Greek word "Logos" an important term that means "the unspoken word in one's mind; one's reason; one's inner being expressed in thought." It was used to describe God's divine being. How does John describe the "Word" in these verses?

- 2) We see a description of John the Baptist in verses 6 through 19. How does John differentiate John the Baptist from the "Word"? What do you think of the imagery of "light"? (we saw this in verses 4 and 5 as well) in contrast to the spiritual darkness (verse 5) of this world? What would the world be like without the "Word" who shines this light into the world?
- 3) According to verses 10 through 13, what two responses have people made to the "Word"? What do you think it means to "receive him?" In what ways have you experienced and continue to experience being a child of God? How has this shaped your life?
- 4) In verse 14 we find a very important and fundamental statement. The "Word" who is God, who is the Creator, who is the source of true life - both physical and spiritual... "became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood" (The Message translation). God became a human being through whom, as the passage continues, "We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish." Can you think of any better way for God to communicate with humankind? Why is this "incarnation" the most effective? How did this act of incarnation show God's humility and willingness to take risk?

IV. Apply It – Reflect and Respond

- 1) Take some time to reflect on this event of God, the Creator, taking on human flesh and entering this world in order to convey love, grace, and truth, and in order to rescue human beings from spiritual darkness. Feel free to express your gratitude to God for such an amazing gift.
- 2) John cites that there is a response on our part to "the Word" becoming flesh, and it is to "receive" him - to "receive" Jesus. That Greek word can mean "to take hold of, acquire, experience, and come to believe." An image the word conveys is that of putting on clothing. How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? Is it one in which you have fully embraced him (taken hold of, acquired a real connection with, experiencing him daily) as Savior and leader in your life? He is God's gift to you - have you truly received that gift?
- 3) What are some ways you can allow Jesus to shine the light he has shined into the world through you? To your family? At work? To your friends?

The living God has made His great, decisive move in coming among us in the flesh! Salvation did not come through "intermediaries" or "emanations" as the early Gnostic sect, the Docetists, insisted it must. To them, the humanity of Jesus was an illusion. He only "seemed" to have a real body. Thus, John answers them boldly, "And the Word became flesh." In this act of incarnation, eternity and time, the divine and the human, salvation and creation, are reconciled. No longer can we divide the sacred and the secular. God has proclaimed His rightful ownership of all that He has created. However, in becoming flesh, the Word did not cease to be God. There is a unity in His person before and after the Incarnation. He is divine. Yet He became flesh. By this act, He became subject to all the

conditions of human existence—the weakness, dependence, and mortality which is our common lot. There is a mystery here beyond which we cannot go. Suffice it to say that our only hope of sharing in the life of God is that the Word has really become flesh. But now God has come to dwell among His people, in His Living Word. Not at the edge of life, for a passing time, but at the center of everything, in the flesh of Jesus, for all time. Those who believe become the abiding place for the Living Word. The company of believers now become the tabernacle, the body in which the Living Word can dwell through His Spirit. God has guaranteed His presence, His settling down permanently in one place, as the Word dwells in us.

Dr. Lloyd Ogilvie