

The Christmas Gift
A Sermon on John 1:1-14
Christmas, 2016
[Lansdowne UMC](#)

I hope you've gotten some Christmas gifts already. Gifts are a great way to show and receive love, aren't they? At their best they show that the giver is attuned to the wants and needs of the recipient. At their best they are a physical representation of the love of the giver.

Gifts say something about the relationship between two persons. Maybe you've noticed this-- some gifts are harder to receive than others. I'm not talking about gifts that are stuff that you didn't really want. Those gifts might not do much good, but they don't do much harm either. It's not too hard to have gratitude for those types of gifts.

I think the hardest type of gift to receive is one that names a flaw or a weakness in you and puts it on display.

Imagine you're gifted a jump rope and a book called, "How to Care for Others.". When you get that gift, you have to decide whether or not you're going to be thankful for the gift. But if you say thank you, you're basically admitting, "yes, I am fat and self-centered." So this is the question-- is what the gift is implying true? You might need nothing more than to lose weight and become less selfish, but you'd rather not have that fact pointed out.

Sometimes the gifts that we need the most are generally the hardest to receive. That's the way that it is with Jesus, the great gift of Christmas.

If you say “thank you” for the gift of Jesus, you’re admitting that Jesus needed to come for you. You’re admitting that you are in fact lost apart from God. If I receive Jesus with thanks, it means that in fact I do not have the goodness or will within myself to pull myself together. I don’t need a stirring up of the goodness inside me, I need a gift of goodness-- a gift of grace and truth. Receiving the gift of Jesus means that I’m hopelessly broken and in need of repair. That apart from him I am dark, and that I need the light of God to come into my life.

This morning I want to spend a little time considering how Jesus is a gift that we should accept with thankfulness. There are many, many ways to think about this. On Christmas Eve, we read the story of Christmas from Luke chapter 2. Luke essentially just lets the story of what happened be the explanation for why it matters. Luke doesn’t have to do a lot of explaining, because there is so much good news present in the story. But there is also the foreshadowing: Jesus is rejected as a newborn baby, even as he will be rejected on the cross. Some gifts are hard to receive, and most of humanity has always rejected Jesus.

The Gospel of John takes a different tactic. [Remember, the Gospel of John ends with the statement that “Jesus did many other things as well, but if all of them were recorded, I imagine the world itself wouldn’t have enough room for the scrolls that would be written.” Every Gospel writer has a wealth of stories to draw from, and John chooses to structure the way he tells the story of Jesus differently.] He doesn’t start with stories about Jesus’ conception and birth, like Matthew and Luke do. John’s Gospel takes it all the way back to creation-- even before creation.

To understand how John presents the gift of Jesus, we need to be reminded of the first verses of Genesis-- the first verses of the whole Bible:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 2 the earth was a formless void and *darkness* covered the face of the deep, while a *wind* from God swept over the face of the waters. 3 Then God *said*, “Let there be *light*”; and there was light.

Before anything but God exists, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in perfect harmony. They exist in perfect love. God doesn't lack anything, but out of a generous desire to share God's own love-- God *speaks* light into the darkness. It is by God's Word that light comes into the world. It's through the Word of God that everything comes into existence. Before any created thing existed, God's Word existed. And God's Word is not only present for the creation of the universe, but God's Word is the means through everything is created. God *speaks* everything into being by his Word. God speaks light. God speaks order into chaos. God speaks life.

And so John, in a way, retells the creation story. He says, “In the beginning was the Word.”

And so on this Christmas Day, we step back from the Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger, and we hear this version of the Christmas story from verse 14 of John chapter one. “And the Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen his glory.”

This is how incredible of a gift Jesus is. The Eternal Word of God, present and active in the creation of everything, came into the world in

the person of Jesus. That's got to be one of the many overwhelming ways to hear the good news of Christmas. Christmas is more than Jesus' birthday, as we usually think of birthdays. And John helps us to step back and get some important perspective on the familiar story. According to John, Christmas is not just an excerpt about an important moment with an important character in the story. For John, it's the climax of the whole story about God acting in the world. It's a focus point for the truth that in Jesus, God is acting in the world in a new way. Let me explain.

In the Old Testament, the glory of God comes into the presence of the people of Israel by descending to the Tabernacle-- the portable Temple that Israel set up in the wilderness. Israel would know that God's presence was there because there was a pillar of cloud that would come down and stand at the entrance of the tent while God talked with Moses (Ex 33:9).

One time while Moses was in the Tabernacle, he prayed to God, "Show me your glory." God responded and said, "I'll make all my goodness pass in front of you..." But, the LORD said, "you can't see my face because no one can see me and live." And so God says he'll place Moses in a gap in the rock, and cover him with his hand until he has passed by. Then once his glory has passed by, God will remove his hand so that Moses can just catch a glimpse of God's back.

No one can see the fullness of God's glory and live. And yet "The Word became flesh," John says, "and lived among us." A more literal translation would be "The word became flesh and tabernacled among

us,” or “pitched his tent among us.” And hear what John says next: “We have seen his glory...”

Jesus is God’s answer to the prayer of Moses. You want to see the glory of God? You want to see God’s face? The way to do that is to look at Jesus. Look at who he is and what he does. The Gospel of John will go on to tell the ways in which Jesus displays his glory through signs, his whole ministry, and especially through his passion, death, and resurrection.

But get this, the night that Jesus and his disciples are in the upper room, Jesus prays for his disciples, and he says to his Father, “I’ve *given them the glory that you gave me...*” (Jn 17:22) The glory of God is what Jesus wants to give all of his disciples. Do you think that maybe we settle for too little as Christians?

God became what we are so that we might become like what God is.

But here is the tragedy:

The true light that shines on all people
was coming into the world.
The light was in the world,
and the world came into being
through the light,
but the world
didn’t recognize the light.
The light came to his own people,
and his own people didn’t welcome him.

Later in chapter 3, Jesus says it this way: and this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, but people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

Accepting the gift of Jesus means accepting the reality of our condition apart from God. It means letting God's word come into the deepest recesses of darkness in our hearts. This is why the The world has always has a hard time receiving the gift of Jesus.

But there have been some who have believed. And John says of them

But those who did welcome him,
those who believed in his name,
he authorized to become God's children,
13 born not from blood
nor from human desire or passion,
but born from God.

Or as the hymn by Charles Wesley says it, Jesus is "Born to give us second birth."

I like the way N. T. Wright puts it. He says, "God wants people from everywhere to be born in a new way, born into the family which he began through Jesus and which has since spread through the world. Anyone can become a 'child of God' in this sense, a sense which goes beyond the fact that all humans are special in God's sight. Something can happen to people in this life which causes them to become new people, people who (as verse 12 says) 'believe in his name'"

So this is the question that I want to ask this morning? Are we *actually* willing to receive the gift of Jesus? Are we actually willing to let the gift of Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, speak truth into our lives? Are we willing to hear that apart from the light, we are darkness? That apart from God's Word, we are chaos? But this is the goodness, Jesus is not simply full of truth. If Jesus were only full of truth, then our condemnation would be certain. But Jesus is full of *grace* and truth, John's Gospel says. Jesus might like the gift that tells you you are fat and selfish, but Jesus' grace gives us the power to receive the truth and be changed.