

Title: What is Christmas. . .Without Christ?  
Date: 12/22/24  
Subject: give thanks to God for Jesus  
Scripture: John 1:14

I didn't put a text in the sermon notes or PowerPoint slide because we're going to have a guessing contest. It's my favorite Christmas verse...at least for this year. If you guess it...you'll receive an all expense paid... How about the admiration of the rest of the church family? Or first in line for Snack & Yack today.

There are lots of great verses. Any guesses?

Good guesses, but...the verse will be revealed as I tell a story, a most unusual story. Some say the story is far-fetched and bizarro, the stuff of legends, myths, folklore and make believe all rolled into one.

I assure you... it is true.

Once upon a time in a distant galaxy that was far, far away and yet so very near...lived a spectacularly wealthy prince. He had everything he could desire and need. In fact, he had never needed anything, for everything in the kingdom belonged to him. His right to rule was unchallenged. His power was unequalled. His character was unparalleled. His presence was all-encompassing. He was totally unique.

Everything owed its existence to him. If something existed, it was because he made it (John 1:3). Nothing existed unless he made it. He made all things. They were created for him, for his use, for his pleasure (Colossians 1:16, 17). And why shouldn't they be? After all, he is the Creator. He could do what he wanted.

I suppose you'd like to know his name. The name he usually went by was Son as it spoke to his deepest relationship, the relationship he had with his Father.

He was the spitting image of his Father (Colossians 1:15). All the Father's fullness dwelt in him. Everything the Father was, he was. They were one in essence, quality, and character. They shared everything together. They had the same power. They received the same honor. They were engaged in the same work.

The Son would come to be known by many names. This happened after he did something remarkable. You might think it was out of character...but it was totally according to his character.

We could go on and on and on about his names, how they fit him to a tee, how they reveal more of his being and ability, but that will have to wait for another time.

One name will be sufficient for now... as what he did is closely tied to this name – The Word.

Previously, the Father, the King, had made numerous attempts at communicating with his subjects. He tried many times and various ways (Hebrews 1:1). There were various degrees of success, but by and large, his message wasn't received very well. It was basically ignored.

It was time for drastic action. The Son would be the communicator who'd clearly deliver the message. There'd no longer be any excuse for misunderstanding. The Son came as the Word. It wasn't just what he said but included who he was and what he did. He was the message. He was wisdom. He was life itself.

The extraordinary thing he did was he became flesh, the flesh of a human. It's a rather harsh, earthy word, considering where he came from. Every fiber, every particle of his person was the same as the Father. He knew everything about everything. He filled the universe with his presence. He was immortal, incapable of dying. He wasn't dependent upon any other entity or being for coming into being or continuing to be. He had no beginning or end. He lived in magnificent, unsurpassed splendor. He was and still is the all-sufficient one (Gen 17:1). He was/is the King (Zech 14:16). He was/is the beginning and the end. He was/is the great I AM (Ex 3:13-15).

He had no needs, no wants, no longings left unfulfilled, no what-ifs that haunted him. There were no gaps in his wisdom, no holes in his personhood, no defects in this character. He was whole, entirely purity, living in a perfectly aligned relationship with the Father.

And yet, He chose to limit himself. He lowered himself. He humbled himself (Philippians 2:6-8). He took on flesh, an earthly body - an existence that is marked by weakness, defects and flaws – without discarding who he was. He didn't become a new existence but a new expression of his existence.

The eternal limited himself to the temporal. The one unlimited by space and time, completely independent, became an embryo, to grow in a young peasant woman's womb, to be born as a dependent baby. From the immaculate, majestic halls of heaven to a dingy, stinky cattle feed trough. He who held the entire universe in his hands would be able to be held in the small hands of the young woman. From breathing life into man to breathing in air polluted by death. From being in command of angel armies to being unable to make a demand for anything except through an infant's cries for food or to be changed. From creating everything that existed just by speaking to being unable to form words for several years. From dwelling in absolute holiness, purity and perfection to an existence not just marred by sin, but ruled and dominated by it. From the throne of God, from being the Most High God who possessed all of magnificent glory with its mind-boggling wonders and incredible delights to the lowly place of being a servant of servants. From heaven where he was totally loved and adored and worshipped to a place where few even care about him. From constant companionship of being with the Father to being alone and betrayed.

He made his dwelling among us, his subjects. You could say it was his home away from home. He lived and breathed what it was like to be human. It was temporary, for a while.

The question that runs through our minds, that should run through our minds, is “why?” Why would a person give up so much, even if it was temporary?

It comes down to one word - love. L O V E. Love compelled him. He knew where people lived. He knew where we lived. He came to find us, to meet us in our overwhelming and devastating need.

One man defined love this way: “Love is giving another person what they need the most, when they deserve it the least, at great personal cost” (Chip Ingram). People are definitely needy, and many are unaware of what they need the most. People are undeserving. There's nothing they could do to deserve what the Word

would do for them. The cost that was paid? It was great. It was personal. And it was one that could only be paid by someone like the Word.

There were times when the curtain was pulled back so people could see glimpses of the totality of who he was, to see his glory. Once, when three of his closest friends were with him, his face shone like the sun and his clothes were as white as the light (Matthew 17:2). A bright cloud enveloped them and they heard the voice of the Father proclaiming his love for the Son and his pleasure in him (Matthew 17:6).

There were other times, like when the Word laid down his life.

What those who trusted in the Word saw couldn't be explained in any other way. It wasn't a dream induced by eating food that disagreed with them. It wasn't a figment of their imagination. It wasn't a mass hallucination. It was the glory of God. They witnessed a vibrant and obvious display of God being there with his majestic splendor and character.

One man put it this way: "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. This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:1-5).

Did you catch the excited repetition as the words were tumbling out of his mouth and pen (as they were written words) – we have heard, we have seen with our eyes...we have looked at and our hands have touched... we have seen... what we have seen and heard? Something profoundly affected him.

"We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son." The Word was the special, one of a kind, emissary from the Father because he is the supreme revelation of the Father. "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, because he is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18).

The Son, the Word, told people that he had come down from the Father (John 6:33, 38, 50, 51). He said that those who know him would know the Father as well, anyone who has seen him has seen the Father, he is in the Father and the Father is in him (John 14:7-11). If see him, see the Father. If touch him, touch the Father. If hear him, hear the Father. If believe in him, believe in the Father.

The message of the Word can be put another way – grace and truth. Grace: The original meaning is "that which causes pleasure," attractiveness, beauty. It's God's kindness, steadfast love, goodwill and favor toward sinners, toward those who resisted and fought against him. Truth: that which is true, complete, genuine and real as opposed to what is false or an illusion. Pulpit Commentary: "Truth" is the expression of the thought of God. Truth, per se, can find no larger definition than the perfect revelation of God's eternal thought

concerning himself and his universe, and concerning the relations of all things to each other and to him. That which God thinks about these things”

The Word is full of grace and truth. Full: abounding in, complete, completely occupied with. He reveals them instead of concealing them. He fully and completely reveals God’s character and purpose – the salvation of people. He reveals how salvation is accomplished – through himself.

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:10-12).

The reason the Word entered the world is so people could gain eternal life, forgiveness of sins, be in a right relationship with God. He showed that God is approachable, reachable and touchable.

The impact of grace and truth don't end when a person enters a relationship with God. That's the beginning. Because of what he went through, he’s able to help those who are tempted to sin or give up (Hebrews 2:17, 18). He sympathizes with our weaknesses and enables us to approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need – suffering, loss, lack of peace (Hebrews 4:15, 16). He identifies with us in every situation, experience, pain. He is there when we're ignored, abandoned and discarded. He provides strength to live.

Psychologists tell us anxiety is a common condition in our world. The most common is free-floating anxiety, meaning there's no identifiable reason for the anxiety. There’s just a general feeling of it.

The first century was similar. People were mired in a secular and naturalistic worldview that held there was no purpose and life was futile. The result - the time was known as “the suicide era.”

Enter the Word who was full of grace and truth to bring hope, love, joy and peace. Peace. The Jewish equivalent is Shalom. It means wholeness, rest, tranquility, well-being and flourishing. The world wants it, longs for it, and tries to find it in numerous ways but fails to be able to bring it about. It's only possible through the Word. He’s the cornerstone on which everything can be anchored and built upon. He provides the firm, stable foundation.

In the movie Narnia, after the children meet Aslan, they are given a new strength, a powerful boldness and deep resolve to go into battle. It’s a picture of what Jesus the Word does for us. When we begin to grasp the depth of God’s love, we become willing, determined, and energized to trust and follow Him in our everyday living, through the pain and loss.

The word didn't come to be a cultural icon or symbol of the season Or part of a tradition that makes us feel good and gives us warm fuzzies. He came to be with us during the highs and lows of life because he gave his life for us so that we could be children of God

Have you figured out the verse?

READ John 1:14

And from Amplified: “And the Word (Christ) became flesh, and lived among us; and we [actually] saw His glory, glory as belongs to the [One and] only begotten *Son* of the Father, [the Son who is truly unique, the only One of His kind, who is] full of grace and truth (absolutely free of deception).”

Preacher Alistair Begg writes about God’s entrance into the world through the Word: “And for one, I don’t believe that it is incongruous in the slightest that the almighty God should both enter as well as exit the world in an entirely supernatural way. In fact, it surely would be bizarre if the almighty creator of the universe did not both arrive and depart in a way that made mere mortals scratch their heads and say, “Wow! I’ve never seen anything like that before.” (truthforlife.org/resources/sermon/birth-jesus-christ-part-two/)

Theologian Wayne Grudem (*Systematic Theology*, p. 563) says of the incarnation, “It is by far the most amazing miracle of the entire Bible—far more amazing than the resurrection and more amazing even than the creation of the universe. The fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God could become man and join himself to a human nature forever, so that infinite God became one person with finite man, will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and the most profound mystery in all the universe.”

There are those who have a contrary opinion. They not only think that God entering humanity is implausible but also ridiculous.

Some have even gone so far as to take legal action against God. A man filed a restraining order, claiming God had been “particularly unkind” and exhibited a “seriously negative attitude” toward him. The judge dismissed the suit. He said the man didn’t need the court’s help but help for his mental health.

The judge should have sentenced him to 30 days...in the Bible, or counseling from a biblical counselor, pastor or Christian friend, or out-patient treatment in a Bible believing church.

Atheist Aldous Huxley reveals the motive behind disbelief: “I had a reason for not wanting to believe in God. I didn’t want to believe in God. Because, to disbelieve in God was for me a basis for moral and political freedom. I could do what I want and I could believe what I want, without reference to any higher power.” (*Ends and Means: An Enquiry into the Nature of Ideals and into the Methods Employed for Their Realization* (312, 316. Paraphrased.)

J. C. Ryle (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, 3:27, 28) asks an important question: “Did the Word become flesh? Then He is One who can be touched with the feeling of His people’s infirmities, because He has suffered Himself, being tempted. He is almighty because He is God, and yet He can sympathize with us, because He is man.

“Did the Word become flesh? Then He can supply us with a perfect pattern and example for our daily life.... Having dwelt among us as a man, we know that the true standard of holiness is to “walk even as He walked” (1 John 2:6). He is a perfect pattern, because He is God. But He is also a pattern exactly suited to our needs, because He is man.

“Finally, did the Word become flesh? Then let us see in our mortal bodies a real, true dignity, and not defile them by sin. Vile and weak as our body may seem, it is a body which the Eternal Son of God was not

ashamed to take upon Himself, and to take up to heaven. That simple fact is a pledge that He will raise our bodies at the last day, and glorify them together with His own.”

A case-worker from the “Birth to 3” program visits our grandson Elijah each week. Zoe gives therapy, counsel, sets goals for him, and helps our daughter Tiffani know what to work on with his development. Elijah’s four sisters have formed quite a connection with her. This past week the girls made Christmas gifts, cards, and pictures for Zoe and were asking her all sorts of questions – “What’s your favorite color? What’s your favorite food?” 32 month old Josie asked, “Who’s your favorite baby?” Zoe replied, “Elijah.” Josie quickly responded, with arms open wide - “No! baby Jesus!”

Oh that we’d have that excitement and clarity about who is important. Jesus Christ, the Word, born as a baby, who lived a perfect life so that by his death he is able to free us from sin, death and the devil, to give us light, eternal life, forgiveness of sins, hope, joy, love and peace. The Gift that Keeps on Giving. “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15) “For he gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).