

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Christmas Day – December 25th, 2011

John 1:1-14

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

⁶There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ⁹The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. ¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Dear children of the heavenly Light,

A few years ago there was a movie that came out about a man who was having trouble controlling his anger, so he went to an anger management counselor. In one scene the angry man attended a group counseling session. The therapist asked the man to tell the group who he was. The man responded by telling them about his profession. The therapist said, "I asked you who you are, not what you do." So the man then told them he likes sports and woodworking. The therapist said, "you are just telling me your hobbies." Again the therapist asked, Who are you? Frustrated the angry man said, "well I am a pretty nice guy..." and the therapist interrupted with, "You are telling me what your personality is. I want to know who you are." The man lost his temper and the therapist said, "I think we now know who you are." It was a funny scene from a movie, but I think that it gets us thinking about a real question.

"Who are you?" is a difficult question to answer. Most of us would respond just like the man from the movie by listing off our job, our personality or hobbies. I am a pastor or a mechanic or farmer and I like to do such and such a thing. We seem to define ourselves by our jobs, our personalities or our hobbies. As someone who likes to look back at history, I think that this question can only be truly answered by looking back into our past. We are the combination of the many things that we have experienced during our lives on this earth. That is why it is difficult to look at a person and tell exactly who they are. Just because a person lives in Wisconsin doesn't mean that their favorite college basketball team is the Wisconsin Badgers or the Marquette Warriors (excuse me I mean the Golden Eagles). Your favorite team might be the Duke Blue Devils because you started watching them when you are a young boy and have always liked them as your team. Trying to figure out who you are can be very complex, but there are many things that go into answering this question. It is the same when we ask this question about Jesus. This will be our theme for today,

Sermon Theme: Who is Jesus?

- 1. He came from the Father**
- 2. He is our substitute**
- 3. He is the giver of grace and truth**

When asked who Jesus is we could respond by saying that Jesus is love, but in a world that thinks of love simply as an emotion or equates love with lust we have to do a little more explaining. How do we explain God is love? We can talk about how in love God cares for us and truly gives us everything that we need. We can talk about all the blessings that come from him, not from ourselves or from loved ones or from the fact that we are just plain lucky.

We could talk about God's love and tell how God sends his angels to protect us. Isn't our God full of great love as he uses such powerful beings to guard us! We can talk about how God's love is consistent. God's love never wavers as the love of this world so often does. God's love is unconditional, and flows forth from his goodness. God's love never reacts to our sinful attempts to be loveable.

But to really explain God's love, we have to talk about who we are and where we are from. We need to go back into our past. As we look into our past, we see that it is not a pretty picture or some glorious history. We were children of the devil. Your parents and my parents rebelled against God. In fact all of our ancestors going back to Adam and Eve rebelled against our creator. God gave them the Garden and they trampled it. He gave them paradise and they rejected it.

But before we use the argument that I am what I am because of my parents, we need to look at ourselves. We need to realize that we have no one to blame but ourselves. It is all too common to blame our problems on our parents, but Adam didn't make me rebel against God. Eve did not force me to sin. **1 John 1:8 says, If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.**" My sin is my sin. Your sin is your sin. It is who we are .

We come from death. The world, as God intended it, died at the fall into sin. It is dead compared to the living perfect Garden that God had made for us. Our parents who gave life to us, just like those who gave life to them will eventually die. Death is the angle from which we need to approach everything. The one side of the coin is to say that we are all going to die so let's have fun while we are here. I am going to die so am only going to be worried about myself, my stuff and my life. Since I am doomed to die, I have nothing to live for.

For people like us, God had a plan. Who could have ever predicted that God would send his son to save people like us? To the very people who rebelled against him, who come from death and sin, God sent his only son. John writes in verse 14, "**We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only.**" It is a very special word that John uses in this verse, monogenes. It means "only begotten." If I were to ask you what the most precious thing in your life is, many of you might think of your children. That gives you a little idea of how precious Jesus is to his Father. He is God's one and only son. The first verse of our text says, "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**" It is the oldest relationship in history, that of God and his Son. Did you catch the end of the verse I just read, "**And the Word was God.**" It is beyond us to understand but is important for us to marvel and to bow down in awe.

We can almost imagine that a man might offer himself to save someone else. But to send his one and only Son, that is the miracle of Christmas! That is God's love. That is who Jesus is. He came from the Father as God's only son. Sometimes I think that we really struggle with believing that the Christ child has been given for us. Every Christmas we come to Bethlehem and kneel down before the Son of God. But then a gigantic pile of wrapped presents crashes down between you and him. It is hard to see Jesus over the mountains of commercialism. And then your family arrives and stands between you and him. Christmas is certainly a time to celebrate the love of family and come together to bow before the Christ. But it is way too easy to let family become the most important thing at Christmas.

Ultimately the thing that gets in the way of Jesus and Christ is sin. The devil whispers, "How can Jesus be for you?" We are not fit to be in God's palace. We are clothed in rags of guilt and covered in the filth of sin and stained with the blood of sins committed against our Heavenly Father. But look around us! We are not in a palace. We are in a stable. Instead of a throne, there is a manger. Instead of guards there

are shepherds. Instead of a crown and a purple robe there are strips of cloth. It is not a spirit you see in the manger or simply a symbol of Christmas. It is a person with a real body. It is the Word made Flesh!

Has that child been given for you? Look closer and you will see yourself. Of course you are not Christ, nor is Christmas about us. But Jesus did come from the Father as our substitute. When we look at him we see ourselves. Our God almighty took on a human body for us. He suffered and took on sin for 33 years for us. He died for us. When we see Jesus on the cross, we can also see ourselves. For our sinful nature, where we are from and who we were, was crucified that day as well. When the Father looks at us, he sees his Son. When we look at the Son, we see the holiness he has given to us. Who is Jesus? He came from the Father as our substitute.

It has been rightly said that Jesus is the greatest Christmas present. But it is also about what Jesus gives. He came from the Father as the giver of grace and truth. This is grace – that for our rags of guilt he gives us robes of righteousness. This is grace – that for the filth of our sin, he washes us clean in the water and the Word. This is grace – that for our bloody wounds of our sin against God, he gives us the salve of free and full forgiveness. Who are you? You are a **“chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.”**

He came from the Father as the giver of truth. That truth goes against earthly reason – The Father loves us. Jesus made flesh is the proof of that truth. Jesus himself said in John 14:9, **“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”** Martin Luther put it this way, “We must see God in the manger at Bethlehem.” There we find out who Jesus is. There we see the God who has been revealed to us in the form of a baby. There we see God’s grace as he deals with sinful people like us. Who is Jesus? We can’t judge him by one simple thing. But as John has proclaimed so purely to us today. Jesus is the one who came from the Father as our substitute to bring us the simple saving message of grace and truth. Have a wonderful Christmas worshipping the true Jesus who came to be Savior. Amen