

## Live in the Light

John 1:1-14

December 25, 2022

This morning, we come together in worship and praise to hear this sacred, sturdy, simple promise: that God's light outshines all darkness. Today we celebrate the deepest truth we know, the greatest cause for hope that we could imagine. On this day, anything seems possible. After all, you are here. On this day, even the places of deepest shadows in our lives are illuminated. On this day, even the most cynical among us find reason to believe in the victory of love, the certainty of life. Today, we do not put restraint on our dreams. We do not control our enthusiasm. We do not hold back our hallelujahs. This morning, we are wise to follow the lead of children unable to contain their wonder and their joy. Today is Christmas Day.

Two millennia ago, the gospel writer we call John could not contain *his* joy, *his* wonder. Though his story contains no angels or wise men or shepherds watching over their flocks by night, John gives powerful witness to the promise of Christmas. John recounts that promise in the form of a poem. He begins his poem...well...in the beginning. The very beginning—the creation of the world. John reaches all the way back to Genesis and insists that all of creation reflects God's majesty, that the Word of God present from the beginning of time is our source of light and life.

Angels from the realms of glory,  
Wing your flight over all the earth;  
You who sang creation's story  
Now proclaim Messiah's birth.

The same angels whose chorus rang out at the dawn of creation now declare a new beginning. John's is a love story that spans all of time. It is the story of God's love for the world. Eternal. Incomprehensible.

Unconditional. And then, at just the right moment, having drawn us into the cosmic drama of creation, John proclaims the Christmas promise: *the word became flesh and lived among us*. That word of God, present at the commencement of creation, comes to make a home in human history. God enters and transforms the world in the birth of Jesus. In this human baby we got a permanent glimpse of God, and in him we came to know more about God than has ever been known. The word became flesh. This is the truth of our faith: that almighty God came close enough to touch. Without this promise, I'm not sure how we could persist in the face of all that is broken and wrong and corrupt and fallen.

Because of this, we can be different; we can do better; we can care more; we can go deeper in faith, and love, and compassion, and forgiveness. If we choose to believe the promise of Christmas, Christmas can change us.

Before the arrival of our sons, Sara and I had an annual tradition of seeing a wonderful production of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta. No matter how many times I see it, the final scene still brings goosebumps. The long night is finally over. The ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future have all come, delivered their message, and gone. And so, Ebenezer Scrooge wakes from a restless sleep to discover that he is still alive. He rushes to the window of his room and shouts to a boy on the street, "What is today?"

Enthusiastically, the boy shouts back, "Why, it's Christmas Day!" Scrooge is ecstatic. In the original story, Dickens writes, "Yes! And the bedpost was his own bedpost. The bed was his own, and the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the time

before him was his own. Time to make amends." The promise of Christmas comes in the fullness of time. Nothing is hopeless. Everything is possible. It's Christmas Day!

John uses the thesaurus. He describes this event using all the words he can find. Life. Glory. Grace. Truth. *Light*. The promise of Christmas is all of that and more. John cannot say enough about what has happened. The eternal word of God became flesh and lived among us, and *nothing* can stop God's love from invading human life.

My favorite Christmas movie growing up was the classic 1966 adaptation of Dr. Seuss' *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* masterfully narrated by Boris Karloff. Despite decades of watching, there is something so moving about all the Whos down in Whoville, gathered together, hand-in-hand, to welcome Christmas morning without all the trappings that the Grinch has stolen in the night. As they sing their joyful song, the Grinch has an epiphany. "And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling, how could it be so? It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags. And he puzzled and puzzled 'till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more?"

The message of Ebenezer Scrooge and the Grinch and the Gospel of John is this: Christmas can transform us. Dickens writes of Scrooge, "He became as good a friend...and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him."

As for the Grinch, "And what happened then? Well... in Whoville they say, that the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day! And the minute his heart didn't feel quite so tight, he whizzed with his load through the bright morning light, and he brought back the toys! And the food for the feast! And he, HE HIMSELF! The Grinch carved the roast beast!"

Now, the transformation of which John writes is no less dramatic, "To all who believed him, to all who received him, he gave power to become children of God." Christmas can change us.

My prayer is that each of us will have such moments on this day and in the days ahead. Moments when Christmas comes, despite it all, without any effort on our part. Moments when something in our heart or our mind is different because of this day. Moments when John's image of light shining in the darkness is more than metaphor. Moments when we trust the truth that the promise of God is not distant or aloof but right here among us. Moments that change our living in tangible ways. Today, we rejoice. Tomorrow, the work of Christmas begins. To do better this year. To speak more truthfully. To care more deeply. To love more fully. To live more joyfully.

The word of God became flesh and lived among us. We have seen his light. Now live in the light of this truth, and let it live in you this year. Amen.