

## **Why We Celebrate Christ**

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John 1:14-18

Christmas is a great time of celebration. Think about it Christmas is the biggest cultural celebration of the year in America. 90% of Americans will celebrate Christmas, and we're going to overdo it. We're going to max out our credit cards and eat too many Christmas cookies and put up way too many lights! You should see our development. It looks like Las Vegas invaded Raleigh, because Christmas is a big celebration! We're here to celebrate tonight. Our church has been anticipating this night for four weeks, as we've observed Advent. Tonight's the night! Our big celebration!

Tonight I want us to think about a simple question, and the question is this: Why? Why is Christmas such a big deal? Why do we celebrate it with such gusto? Why should anyone celebrate Christmas at all?

I wondered about that this week while I was preparing for this talk. I wanted to see how some people might answer that question "Why do we celebrate Christmas?" I went to the internet. I visited several web pages that had titles like "Why I love to celebrate Christmas" or "Why everyone should have a merry Christmas."

The reasons for celebration that I found on these websites were not particularly surprising. They said things like: I love the Christmas trees, they are so beautiful, and they smell so nice. I love gifts. Christmas is a beautiful season of giving and receiving. I love the decorations. They are so bright and joyful. Several websites said they loved Christmas movies, like *It's a Wonderful Life* or *A Christmas Story* or *Elf*. The other night my family got together and watched once again the greatest Christmas movie of all time: *Die Hard*! Just kidding! These websites mentioned lots of reasons to celebrate Christmas, things like Parties and snow. Most of them mentioned the fact that you get to spend lots of time with relatives.

So it was not a surprising list. But what was surprising is this: Just out of curiosity, I decided to look at some other web pages, web pages with titles like "Why I don't celebrate Christmas" or "Why Christmas Stinks" or "10 reasons to hate Christmas." You get the picture. What I found really interesting is this: When you compare the list of reasons that people hate Christmas and say you should never celebrate it with the list of reasons that people love Christmas and celebrate it, what you find is this: it's the same list! Some people are like "I love the trees" others are like "You're killing trees." Some are like "I love the gifts" others are like "It's a big over-commercialized rip-off." "The decorations are so pretty." "The decorations are so gaudy!" "There's snow." "There's snow." Some people are like "You get to spend lots of extra time with your family and in-laws." Others are like "exactly." The point is this: When it comes to things like gifts and snow and trees, not everyone agrees on what there is to celebrate in Christmas.

So tonight I thought we would take a few minutes to look at what the Bible says about why we have so much to celebrate at Christmas-time, why tonight is a night of such celebration. To do that, we're going to look at an interesting passage in the Bible.

This passage is NOT one of those passages that we always expect to hear at Christmas time. There's no angels, or shepherds, or wise-men in it. But it is a passage that is all about Christmas, a passage that shows us why Christmas time is a time that Christians anticipate and rejoice in and celebrate so strongly. This passage which some scholars have called the greatest, most profound passage in all of the Bible will give us three reasons we should celebrate tonight. It's found in the first chapter of John's gospel. Whereas Matthew and Luke start their gospels with the ground-level, earthly view of Christmas with Mary and Joseph and the shepherds, John talks about Christmas from the heavenly viewpoint.

In the first 13 verses of this chapter, John has been referring to Jesus with the title "the Word." He's been describing Jesus as he existed in eternity past, as Creator and Life-giver and Deity. Then starting in John 1:14, John makes an amazingly profound statement. Listen closely to what he says:

*The 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 .From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*

- John 1:14-18

So, why should we celebrate Christmas this holiday that commemorates Christ's birth? If you like trees and presents and your relatives, that's great! But this passage gives us three bigger, more amazing reasons we should celebrate Christ's birth tonight. The first is this:

## **We celebrate because in Christ, God came to be one of us**

In verse 14 of the passage I just read, John makes an interesting statement. Look at how John describes the birth of Christ: “The word became flesh, and dwelt among us.”

When we first hear that, it might sound a little mysterious. It might not mean much to us. If we were to study John’s gospel as we’ve been doing here at Perry Creek, we would find that when John says “The Word became flesh” he is making an extraordinary claim, a claim that, if we stop to think about it, is mind blowing! Earlier in this chapter, right at the beginning of his gospel, John said this about the “Word” that he is describing:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

- John 1:1-3

What John is saying is this: The Word, the one who was with God in the beginning, the one who created all things - life, and light, and land, and sea, and humanity, all things - took on an earthly human existence in the form of Jesus. It’s an extraordinary breathtaking, mind-blowing claim.

In fact, let me give you some idea of the scope of what John is claiming here. Here’s a picture of earth. We think of earth as a pretty big place. It’s about 8,000 miles in diameter, and there are places that you and I will never explore or even know about on this planet. It’s big. But earth is puny compared to our Sun. In fact, you could fit 1,300,000 of our earths into the sun. The sun is bigger! Now the Sun is a star. But there are other stars out there. Here are some pictures from the Hubbel space telescope of some other stars that are out there. These are exploding stars, called Nebulae. Aren’t they beautiful? Now that’s what I call Christmas lights! Each of those stars is part of a galaxy. Here’s what a galaxy looks like, again taken from the Hubbel. See each of those little red points of light? See all that dust-looking stuff? Each one of those is a star like our sun. There’s a lot, isn’t there? In fact, there are so many that if you started counting off stars one by one one star per second (one thousand one ), do you know how long it would take you to count off just the stars in our own galaxy; the Milky Way? 2,500 years. And there are hundreds of billions of galaxies.

Now, here’s what I want you to understand: When John says “The Word became flesh,” he’s saying that the Creator of all that the one who was with God and was God the Word of God, he is saying The Creator of all things came to earth. Do you know how profound that is?

Look at the way John puts it: He doesn’t say Jesus “became human.” He says “He became flesh.” “Flesh” is the word the Bible uses to describe the weak part, the fragile part, the broken part of our existence on earth. The Creator came to earth. He didn’t come in a giant space-ship (though he could have). He didn’t live in a fancy palace (though he could have). He didn’t appear as a conquering King (though he certainly could have). He came as a helpless baby, born

in a conflict-ridden part of this world, born to a couple that were among the poor of the earth and laid in a feeding trough, because we couldn't make room for him in the inn.

At Christmas time, we Celebrate the fact that the Highest of the High became the Lowest of the Low so that he could reach everyone in-between and become a Savior for all Nations.

(1) We celebrate because, in Christ, God came to be one of us.

## **We celebrate because in Christ, we see what God is really like**

One of the greatest, most important, most profound questions man has ever asked is the simple question “What is God like?” We want to know what he’s like. Is he a person or a force? Is he good or evil or both? Is he all about rules? Does he have compassion? What moves him? What angers him? What is God like? We celebrate tonight because we know what God is like in a way that we never could have known before the coming of Christmas. Look what John says:

*No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, (in other words, Jesus) has made him known*

- John 1:18

Look at the verse again. Do you see that phrase “has made him known”? Other translations say “he has revealed God” or “declared God.” The word John used in his original language means “to explain something in a detailed and systematic way.” One translation puts it “Jesus has made God plain as day.” Jesus has answered the great question: What is God like? He has shown us in a detailed and systematic way, what God is really like.

So how did he do that? We said that Jesus was the Word of God. He was and is the second person of the Trinity. Now look at what John says:

*The 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.*

- John 1:14

How did he do it? He became flesh and made his dwelling among us. John literally says “Jesus set up his tent among us as we saw his glory.” The way Jesus revealed God, the way he explained what God was like, is by living among us among you and me on earth, so we could see what God is like, how he thinks, what moves him, what he wants his people to be like. Jesus shows us all of that.

Down through the ages God had done numerous deeds, so that his people could see what he was like. He had inspired numerous writings. Laws and commands to show his justice, and prophecy to show the goodness of his plan and even beautiful, amazing poetry to show God’s passion and heart for his people. He gave his people that to show them what he was like.

But they always got it wrong. They took his laws and either ignored them completely or made it all about the rules which was never God’s heart. They took his prophecy and misinterpreted it and persecuted the prophets. They chose the parts of the poetry that they liked and ignored the rest. For 1,400 years, God gave his people a written description of what he was like. But they always got it wrong. They never understood his heart.

So God did something extraordinary. He sent his Son Jesus to be his exact representation in human flesh, so that we could see what God’s heart is truly like. So that if you really want to

answer the question: What is God like? What his his heart like? What moves him? If you really want to know that, you shouldn't read a book about theology. You shouldn't take a course on divine attributes. John says if you really want to know what God is like, you shouldn't even read the Laws and commands of the Old Testament. The simplest, clearest way to find out what God is like is to look at Jesus.

Look at Jesus who had compassion on the sick. That's what God is like. Look at Jesus who welcomed the outsider, the people that others considered too sinful or too sick or too unclean to even touch. That's what God is like. Look at Jesus who stood against religious hypocrisy and called it sin. That's what God is like. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus who willingly gave up his life on a cross so that you and I could be forgiven for our sin. He gave everything for you. Listen that's what God is like. Jesus is what God is like.

Notice that John uses two words to describe what he and the other disciples saw in Jesus. John says "He was full of grace and truth." Grace and truth. Grace and truth. Grace, God's unmerited, undeserved favor and kindness. Truth, the way things really are. The way God made them to be. That's what God is. If you follow Jesus, you are going to find more of those two things than you will ever experience anywhere else, I promise you. You will find truth about your situation - your brokenness, your need for a Savior. You will find more than enough Grace to forgive you and love you completely and make you whole.

The second reason we celebrate tonight is because, in Christ, we really see what God is like. So we celebrate (1) Because in Christ God became one of us, and (2) because, in Christ, we see what God is like. Now there's one more reason we celebrate at Christmas, and it's this:

## **We celebrate because, in Christ, we are invited to receive God's grace**

It's not just that, in Christ, God became one of us as, amazing as that is. It's not just that, in Christ, we saw God's grace from a distance. It's more personal than that. In Christ, God actually invites you and me to receive the grace of God. Let me show you what I mean. look at what John says in verse 16

*From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.*

- John 1:16

In John's original language, that's an interesting verse. Literally, what it says in Greek is this: "From his fullness, from the true nature of God that was wrapped up in Jesus' human flesh, we have received grace in place of, or instead of, grace." The idea is that there is an exchange of one type of grace for another, for another all coming from Jesus. Grace upon grace or, as our translation puts it, "one blessing after another."

When I read that, I think about one Christmas that Kelley and I had years ago. I think Calvin had just been born and Elisabeth was two. Kelley and I were so busy with ministry that year that we literally did not have time to buy Christmas presents. We were so busy that our anniversary was the 23rd, and we literally just took a 30 minute break to eat together and worked at the church until 2am. It was going to be a sad Christmas, and I felt like a really bad Dad.

I remember Christmas Eve came, and we went to church. For no reason, because we hadn't told anybody and no one had organized it, people started giving us gifts, one after another after another in a way that I never experienced before or since. Person after person handed us wrapped gifts in the church, til we were in tears! then when we got to the car. there were more gifts inside. When we got home, there were gifts on the front porch. One gift after another after another, until we had the biggest Christmas that our family has ever had! It was overwhelming and humbling and amazing. Gift after gift after gift.

That's what God offers you tonight in Christ. One grace after another. Grace for the forgiveness of your sins, so you don't have to worry about the past. Grace that shows you the purpose for your life that gives you something to live for, that teaches you how God made you to live. Grace that gives you strength for those moments of temptation or trial where you can't make it on your own. Grace that can make you a new person. Grace in the form of God's presence. He will come to live inside you, so that you don't ever have to be alone.

God offers you all of that tonight. Some of the people around you tonight have found life in Jesus this year, and they will tell you something: No matter who you are, no matter what kind of hot mess your life is, whether Christmas is your favorite, or whether you came in here tonight with a knot in your stomach and fighting back tears, no matter who you are, God loves you. He offers you the gift of life in his Son, the one and only who is at the Father's side.

He became human for you. He has shown you what God is really like, and He invites you to receive the gift of his grace tonight. That is what we have to celebrate at Christmas.