



Sermon - Christmas 2021

John 1:1-14

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus, the babe born in Bethlehem.

I remember as a child hearing my father preach on this text. I thought it was mysterious, and there was something about it that really drew me to it, but I really didn't understand it. I much preferred the Christmas account in Luke's gospel with angels and shepherds and a baby in a manger.

The first few verses in John's gospel are very complex and seem more like they are proving doctrine than they are proclaiming the gospel. And then we come to this this verse: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

This year, this promise seems more desperately needed than ever. Because there has been a lot of darkness in this past year. COVID continues to dominate our lives, with new variants seeming to take away our hope that this pandemic will ever end.

More people are struggling with mental health problems due to fear or isolation or job insecurity or a combination of all of these and more.

We have experienced the effects of global climate change in many parts of the world, but also in Canada itself — heat domes, massive forest fires, drought, atmospheric rivers and catastrophic flooding. These have affected people's lives and livelihoods and it might be years until full recovery is possible.

But in the face of all these challenges and more, we hear the promise The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. No matter how hard we are experiencing life, we are promised that God will be with us and that we will not be overcome.

Jesus' birth continues to be God's promise to the world, a message of hope in the midst of darkness, difficulty and despair. A reminder that the final word will be the Word of God, come to us in human form and showing us a way of love and peace and justice and hope.

The Christmas card we sent out from the National Office this year included this quote from Martin Luther: *The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem is not a one-time story, but a gift that will last forever.*

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John's gospel says the same thing this way: *And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

Jesus was born in very difficult times under Roman occupation. Mary was a young mother experiencing a miraculous birth. Joseph was an initially resistant father. They came to a city that was overcrowded to take part in a Roman census. Soon after Jesus' birth they would become refugees in Egypt.

But into those dark times God spoke a word that became flesh, Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus came into the world and experienced what we experience. Joys, sorrows, pain, doubt. Jesus has promised to be with us now, to walk with us, to light our way in our times of darkness, to constantly remind us of God's unending love and care for us.

What we celebrate this Christmas season is not the anniversary of a one-time event, but rather the ongoing life-giving light that continues to guide us in this world and beyond.

Receive this Christmas blessing:

*May the joy of the angels,
the eagerness of the shepherds,
the perseverance of the wise men,
the faith of Joseph,
the courage of Mary
and the peace and light of the Christ Child
be yours this Christmas.
And the blessing of God all-loving
Mother of all, Incarnate word and Holy Spirit
Be with you and all those you love
Today and always. Amen.*