

The Word was God!

Sermon for Christmas Day, 2014

Immanuel Lutheran Church

John 1: 1-14

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Although I've said "Merry Christmas" to many of you already, I want to do so officially from the pulpit because we have something to be joyous about. In fact, there is nothing more joyous than to celebrate the ultimate gift of God the Father: the miraculous birth of His son, Jesus to the Virgin Mary. So, "Merry Christmas!"

Each of our Gospel writers treat the incarnation from a different perspective. Mark, the earliest of the four, gets right to the point. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." He then goes on to remind us that this was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, that a messenger would be sent to prepare the way. He then identifies that messenger as John the Baptist. Matthew begins his account by stating the genealogy of Jesus, tracing him back to Abraham. Luke focuses on the miraculous birth of John the Baptist and then describes the conversation between the angel Gabriel and Mary: that she would give birth to Jesus, and then follows it with Mary's response, the Magnificat, which was our reading for this past Sunday.

John begins with mystery. And after all, this is all about mystery. And I want to emphasize that mystery is something which is *real, absolutely real and true*, but is beyond the power of any means of explanation.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the *Word was God*.

In the beginning: beginning-wise---with respect to the beginning. When the universe was being created----that time---Creation----at that time was the Word. Before Creation, God existed—“and the Word was with God, *and the Word was God!*”

Now, we know from the First book of Moses, commonly called Genesis—beginning—that God spoke, and all was created. God spoke, and from God’s Word, life burst forth.

The opening of the letter to the Hebrews speaks about God’s Word. “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, *but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son*”.

So throughout the ages, God has spoken to us: through Scripture, the Torah, the prophets. What was God’s message? I am going to answer that in two ways.

Here’s the first. God’s message is that God has created all things and has called all things into relationship with Him and with each other. There are guidelines which will make this relationship work. The Ten Commandments spell out these guidelines. They outline how God relates to His creation, and how the creatures relate to God, and to their fellow creatures.

These were not fabricated to suit one group over another. They are the Word of God. Think of them as three sides of a triangle. In order for the triangle to have integrity as a structure, each side has a relationship with the others. Change one side and you have changed that original structure.

Now here's the second. God's message is a shortened, more potent, more intense, commandment in the Book of Deuteronomy. It really is a summation of the Ten Commandments. "The LORD our God is one LORD, and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." (Dt 6: 4-6) There is a reason why we are called upon to Love the LORD our God in such an intense way. It's because this is exactly what God has done and is doing for us, His creation. The creation of the universe was an act of love. Sending forth His only Son, Jesus, fully God and also fully human to dwell among us is an act of love.

Creation was an act of love, and it was God's design, His intent, that all the components relate to each other in a loving way. This original structure was beautiful---while it lasted, but something happened. Something changed, which changed everything: The Fall. Prior to this, the Word of God was strong and clear. But there was distraction and distortion, which led to disobedience. And this has been the pattern over and over and over again, through the ages.

The Word was God, but the people didn't listen.

The Word was God, spoken by the prophets. The Word was God. It was a strong voice, but there were always distractions and distortions. Despite the Word of God coming from the prophets, the Israelites of old continued to worship other gods in high places. The prophets warned of destruction. Their warnings came to be. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were led into exile.

But nothing changed in the Word of God. The message was very strong: I will be your God and you will be my people. I have created---my Word has created a beautiful relationship. Come back and be a part of my family.

Now the readings in the lectionary leading up to today stressed the same theme. God says, “I am—the God of being---the Word---I am calling you back to me. Reconsider your relationship with me. Be baptized and repent. Come back. I want you.”

Today, we celebrate a new phase of this message: God loves us with all His heart, and all His soul, and all His might, so much so that He sends us His Son. Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary to be born: fully God and fully human. Jesus is the embodiment, the incarnation of God’s Word. Jesus *is* the Word of God.

The Word was God.

In this infant whose birth we celebrate today is the message of God---God’s Word---His plan for us. This message is all-encompassing. It is infinite in size yet it can be summed up very briefly: Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might, and in doing so, you will love your neighbor as yourself, because you will be in a right relationship with God’s creation, *and this is because God has done the very same thing for us.*

And the Word was God. The message is clear. We have countless stories in the gospels telling how Jesus thoroughly lived out this message. He gives sight to the blind, strength to the crippled, cleanses the lepers not for the purpose of astounding others with miraculous deeds, but simply to help those in need—because they are part of this relationship created by God. Jesus’ life was a life of care-giving. Everything He did was an example of how to adjust the sides of that triangle in order to correct the relationships among its sides. Because God loved us so much, it took a momentous adjustment to make those relationships right: Jesus giving His life for us on the Cross. He was crucified so that we would be saved---brought back into that right relationship

with God. I think you would agree that the message of Jesus' life was clear. The signal was strong. *The Word was God.*

I am going to change gears here for a moment and tell you a story. When I was a boy, back in simpler times, I had a transistor radio. You might have heard of these things! Anyway, back then, when the Buffalo Bills played their home games, they weren't televised. The only way to follow the game was with my transistor radio. I always had to keep adjusting the dial with the most subtle movement of my finger to hear the broadcast or I would lose the signal. It's not that the signal was weak. It was strong. I think the station would boast of broadcasting with 15,000 megawatts of power! But there would be interference. Sometimes the weather (you know, those lake-effect snow storms) would effect it. Sometimes all of a sudden another station would come on the air. I remember being frustrated that this station from New York City: WABC would all of a sudden appear. And I would have to keep adjusting. So it took perseverance to hear the signal. It was always there, but there was interference.

Now in the 21st century, in our digital age, we don't have to be concerned with interference---or do we? Everyone seems to have electronic gadgets which keep them up-to-date on what they feel to be important: the latest news, the stock market, the latest pop culture and fashion, facebook postings, tweets. And the technology is so excellent that there's no need to be continually adjusting the dial or moving to a place with better reception. And this all works so perfectly that at any time of day and from virtually any place one can tune in.

The problem is that the information which is fervently being sought is not God's Word. This is the 21st Century version of the distractions, the static, the noise which interferes with the

one message we really need to hear more of: The Word of God. God's message is clear, the signal is strong, but the interference and distractions have increased geometrically in this digital age.

And as in all the ages past, this interference would have us believe that it is reality. But this is not so. God's Word is reality. *The Word was God.*

We are here today celebrating a mystery: a reality: a truth which is beyond our powers of explanation. St. Paul speaks about this in his letter to the Colossians when he refers to "the riches of glory of this *mystery*, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Col 1: 27) He goes on to state that Jesus is our way of knowing the mystery of God. "...to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of *God's mystery, of Christ*, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col 2: 2b-3)¹ Creation is a gift of love from God. The birth of Jesus Christ is a gift of love from God. This is a mystery, but I repeat: a mystery is a reality, a truth we know through faith. God's Word is a gift to us. God's Word took the form of human life in the birth of Jesus.

As we move forward into our new year, let us give pause for this. Let us take stock. Are we as Christians being led by the 24/7 digital information world? Are we allowing this interference to harm our ability to hear God's Word? Hearing God's Word doesn't require electronic devices. Can we find a patch of time on a regular basis to be listening more to God's Word? Here are some suggestions: finding a way to schedule time for daily reading of Scripture, finding time for an extra daily prayer, or attendance at bible study or mid-week services. In any case, be strengthened by these words found in the Letter of Jude: "In the last times there will be

¹ G. Bornkamm in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, editor (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), IV: 817. I am indebted to this essay on the understanding of μυστήριον (mystery).

scoffers, following their own ungodly passions. It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, build yourselves upon your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” (Jude: 20-21)

The message is clear. The signal is strong. Will we take the time to adjust our dial to listen? The news could not possibly be better: God loves us. He wants us to be in right relationship with Him to do His work in the Kingdom now. Will we make the time to listen?

The message is clear. The signal is strong. *The Word was God*, to whom belongs all glory and honor: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.