

He Dwelt Among Us
John 1:1-18
December 17th, 2017

Intro –

In many ways our emotions peak at Christmas, both positive and negative emotions.

“The most wonderful time of the year” – we feel nostalgia when Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer comes on tv, we feel joyful at Christmas lights and snow on Christmas day. We sing “Joy to the World” and celebrate with people we love.

But, conflict also peaks for many families. And loneliness. And depression.

Why such extremes?

Busyness, parties, pressure to purchase the right gifts, financial pressure as you purchase them.

Sense of sadness as you are confronted with one less gift to buy or an empty chair because someone you love is no longer there.

Sometimes sadness because the peripheral things are so hyped that when it doesn't turn out like a Hallmark Christmas special we are disappointed. The kids cry when they open their gifts because it isn't quite right. The dinner burns. Its 50 degrees and no snow and you wanted a white Christmas.

How do we combat these extremes?

We combat these extremes the same way Linus did in the classic Charlie Brown Christmas.

We combat these extremes by centering on truth. Christmas reminds us of a truth to be believed rather than mere feelings to feel.

God carried out His plan to interrupt human history as a man, welding deity to humanity in the form of an infant child.

As Matthew describes the events of Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching; John, more than any other gospel, plunges underneath to the theology that undergirds Him. They tell us the *what*, he tells us the *so what*.

The first 18 verses form a prologue to the book that summarizes what is unpacked in the rest of John's gospel.

Big idea: The eternal second member of the triune God became a man, was rejected by many, but received by a few.

1. Before lying in a manger, Jesus **created** everything in the universe. (1:1-3)
 - a. John doesn't wade into the deep end of the pool by starting with a family record leading from Abraham to Jesus or with the story of Jesus' birth to the virgin Mary. He cannonballs into it with his description of Jesus that goes back to the beginning of time.
 - b. What was He doing before He was born?
 - i. John the Baptist declared that “he existed before me” in v. 15
 - ii. Jesus Himself said, “before Abraham was born, I am” in John 8:58
 - iii. When we meet someone we often ask 3 questions – what's your name? What do you do? Where are you from?
 1. Here he tells us where Jesus is from.

- c. He is referred to as “the Word” in John 1.
 - i. Logos – Greeks used it to describe the rational principle behind the world’s order. His Jewish audience would have recognized God’s creative power embedded in “the Word.”
 - 1. God created with a Word in Genesis 1.
 - 2. **Psalm 33:6** By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And by the breath of His mouth all their host.
 - 3. All things came into being through Him
 - a. Apart from Him nothing came into being
 - b. “came into being” is an event, not a process. And it refers to everything – space, time, universe – everything except the Triune God.
 - c. Extended quote from ch. 1 of *The Holiness of God* by Sproul (see attached at the end)
 - d. If anything “came into being” it was through Him, down to the molecules and atoms and protons and electrons that make up your body.
 - i. How can such power be compressed and fit into a frail baby?
 - ii. That should cause us to marvel at Christmas.
 - 4. In addition to His creative power, “The Word” also refers to the way in which He spoke the Father’s message to people.
 - a. **John 3:34** "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God;
 - b. **John 12:49** "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment *as to* what to say and what to speak.
 - c. **John 17:8** for the words which You gave Me I have given to them;
 - d. As God, Jesus didn’t have a beginning.
 - i. In the beginning, He was already there.
 - ii. **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
 - iii. There was a point in time when His humanity began – His conception and then 9 months later His birth, but that wasn’t His beginning.
 - e. He was both *with* God and *was* God
 - i. Distinct from God but also God – the word “Trinity” isn’t in the passage, but the concept sure is.
 - ii. RC Sproul - This sentence, more than any other passage in Scripture, is foundational for the church's confession of the doctrine of the Trinity, the belief that God is one in three persons.
 - 1. It kept theologians busy for the first hundred years of church history trying to understand how he could be distinguished from God but also identified with God.
- 2. Jesus brought ***life*** and ***light*** to a world in darkness. (1:4-8)
 - a. In Him was life

- i. All life owes its dependence on Him as creator for physical life. But it is likely spiritual life that is in mind here because of its connection to light.
- b. The opposites of life and light are death and darkness.
 - i. Those two things define and describe much of our experience in a broken and sin-cursed world.
 - ii. Whether it's our own physical bodies that inch toward the grave as parts stop working like they should and start hurting like we wish they wouldn't. Or a sudden and unexpected passing of someone we love. We are confronted with death and can't hide our faces from it.
 - iii. Of course the Bible also uses death to describe our spiritual state.
 - 1. **Ephesians 2:1** And you were dead in your trespasses and sins . . .
 - iv. We need life that only He gives and we need truth that penetrates the darkness.
 - 1. As a symbol of the season we cover our homes in Christmas lights. In a way it's appropriate that we celebrate the birth of Christ at a time of year when he almost certainly was not born. He was probably born in the spring. But we celebrate only 4 days after the shortest day of the year in the northern hemisphere. Intense darkness. Long darkness. Dark when you wake up in the morning, dark when you get home from work.
 - 2. Works as a metaphor for the spiritual darkness that characterizes the World. And Jesus penetrated that darkness and shines light.
 - 3. **Matthew 4:14-16** *This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:* ¹⁵ "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES-- ¹⁶ "THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED."
- c. People may mock those who have converted to faith in Christ as saying they "saw the light" but that's the phrasing here.
- d. John the Baptist's ministry is briefly described here before giving the next section in the chapter over to him. His job was to point to the light.

vv. 9-13 contain the responses to Jesus, but I want to hold off on that for a moment and skip ahead to vv. 14-18.

- 3. Jesus is truly **God** and truly **man**. (1:14-18)
 - a. This Word became flesh
 - i. **Hebrews 2:14a** Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same,
 - ii. **Hebrews 2:17a** Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things. . .
 - iii. He took on a body whereas before He had no body. But it wasn't pretend, it was real humanity that He clothed Himself with.
 - b. He dwelt among us
 - i. The disciple John penned these words and he did literally dwell with Jesus in His incarnation. Literal meaning of the word for "dwelt" is "pitched a tent." He pitched His tent among us.
 - ii. But you could broaden out the "us" to refer to humanity.

iii. **2 Corinthians 8:9** For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

1. He exchanged riches for poverty – literally poor as a human even compared to other humans. But even if he was born in an earthly palace instead of a stable it still would have been an immeasurable contrast to the riches He gave up. Heaven is a pretty nice neighborhood.
2. But much more than wealth, He limited the independent use of His divine attributes by clothing Himself in humanity. He wasn't all knowing. He became hungry. He grew weary. He suffered.

c. We have a God who entered in to the pain of humanity and suffered with us and for us.

d. As we will sing in "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

- i. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail th' incarnate Deity! Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel
- ii. Some groups don't sing this verse. They skip it because it so clearly advocates for the deity of Christ.

e. His glory

- i. Likely referring most directly to the transfiguration when John witnessed a brief glimpse of Jesus' glory and affirmation from the Father.
- ii. But also extends to His life and teaching about grace and truth. He embodied these things as we've seen week after week in Matthew this summer and fall.

f. Jesus was the full expression of God's **grace**. (vv. 16-17)

- i. Nothing lacking in it. God's redemptive plan fully realized, fully culminated in Jesus.
- ii. The law of Moses gave people a sense of God's holiness in contrast with man's sin.
- iii. Jesus provided the answer to the problem the law presented. How could sinful man enter into the presence of a holy God?

g. Jesus was the clearest **explanation** of God. (v. 18)

- i. We can only know God because He took initiative. He made Himself known.
- ii. What we have in our nativity sets is a reminder of God's initiative to make Himself known to us, to explain Himself to us in the fullest way possible.

4. Christmas requires a **response**. (1:9-13)

a. The greatest tragedy in human experience is described in these verses.

- i. He was in the world, the very world He hurled into existence, populated by His image bearers made from the dust of the earth. They were His own. But they did not receive Him.
- ii. **Isaiah 53:2-4** For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. ³ He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did

not esteem Him. ⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

1. Past tense in referring to a future event because it predicted the rejection of the Messiah by His own people who realize too late who He was.
- b. But He wasn't rejected by all. Some "received Him."
- i. They accepted Him, they comprehended Him, they listened to the truth He brought and acknowledged it as true.
 - ii. Paralleled in this passage with "believed on His name"
 - iii. **John 3:18** "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
 - iv. The invasion of humanity by its creator on a rescue mission is not a fact we can remain neutral regarding.
 1. There are some facts that you can merely assent to.
 - a. The moon revolves around the earth, the earth revolves around the sun. You can merely accept this as fact without being radically changed by it.
 2. But Christmas demands a response. Rejection or acceptance. It's either true or it's not.
- c. Those who receive/believe are born again.
- i. Like "seeing the light" this phrase is almost mocked. But it is a biblical description of what is necessary for men and women.
 - ii. Born not through a physical process (blood), through physical marriage (will of the flesh/man), but born of God.
 - iii. This is the gift brought by the baby in the manger.

The first sound uttered in the universe was the voice of God commanding, "Let there be!" It is improper to say that this was the first sound "in" the universe because until the sound was made there was no universe for it to be in. God shouted into a void. ...

The command created its own molecules to carry the sound waves of God's voice farther and farther into space. Yet sound waves would take too long. The speed of this imperative exceeded the speed of light. As soon as the words left the Creator's mouth, things began to happen. Where His voice reverberated, stars appeared, glowing in unspeakable brilliance in tempo with the songs of angels. The force of divine energy splattered against the sky like a kaleidoscope of color hurled from the palette of a powerful artist. Comets crisscrossed the sky with flashing tails like Fourth of July skyrockets.

The act of creation was the first event in history. It was also the most dazzling. The Supreme Architect gazed at His complex blueprint and shouted commands for the boundaries of the world to be set. He spoke, and the seas were shut behind doors, and the clouds were filled with dew. He bound the Pleiades and buckled the belt of Orion. He spoke again, and the earth began to fill with orchards in full bloom. Blossoms burst forth like springtime in Mississippi. The lavender hues of plum trees danced with the brilliance of azaleas and forsythia.

God spoke once more, and the waters teemed with living things. The snail sneaked beneath the shadowy form of the stingray, while the great marlin broke the surface of the water to promenade on the waves with his tail. Again He spoke, and the roar of the lion and the bleating of sheep were heard. Four-footed animals, eight-legged spiders, and winged insects appeared.

And God said, "That's good."

Then God stooped to earth and carefully fashioned a piece of clay. He lifted it gently to His lips and breathed into it. The clay began to move. It began to think. It began to feel. It began to worship. It was alive and stamped with the image of its Creator.

...

The Bible says, "In the beginning God." The God we worship is the God who has always been. He alone can create beings, because He alone has the power of being ... He is pure Being, the One who has the power to be all by Himself. He alone is eternal. He alone has power over death. He alone can call worlds into being by fiat, by the power of His command. Such power is staggering, awesome. It is deserving of respect, of humble adoration.



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R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*

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