

"What Child Is This?"
Isaiah 52:7-10 John 1:1-14 Hebrews 1:1-4; 5-12

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 52:7-10

Isaiah speaks of a messenger that is coming from the mountains. Joyously the messenger cries out "Our God reigns." Last night we heard from messengers in the heavens declaring that the One who Reigns is born!" Hear the word of the Lord from Isaiah 52:7-10

INTRODUCTION TO JOHN 1:1-14

Last night we heard Luke's story of a young mother, of angels and shepherds and a manger. Matthew lets us in on a visit from wise men. Mark is silent about the whole thing and starts out with John the Baptist in the wilderness preparing the way. The writer we know as John has no angels, shepherds, or even Mary Joseph and Jesus. That is why it might be healthy for us on this Christmas Day to turn to the opening chapter of John's Gospel for our scripture lesson. Instead of angels, shepherds, a star, or even Mary and Joseph there is some of the most beautiful and important theological language ever written: Hear the gospel of our Lord from John 1:10-20

Let's pray, Lord, thank you for these words that tell us about THE WORD, the Word made flesh, Jesus. As we meditate on these words, may THE WORD come alive in us and may we go forth from here changed, transformed, filled with your Holy Spirit to witness to what we know in word AND deed. Amen

Christmas Eve means different things, depending on your age. For children it is the most exciting evening of the year as you await the arrival of almost everything you wanted. For parents it might mean something more. One unknown mother sent her own requests to Santa:

Dear Santa, I've been a good mom all year. I've fed, cleaned, and cuddled my two children on demand, visited their doctor's office more than my doctor, sold sixty-two cases of candy bars to raise money to plant a shade tree on the school playground, and figured out how to attach nine patches onto my daughter's girl scout sash with staples and a glue gun.

I was hoping you could spread my list out over several Christmases, since I had to write this letter with my son's red crayon, on the back of a receipt in the laundry room between cycles, and who knows when I'll find any more free time in the next 18 years.

Here are my Christmas wishes: I'd like a pair of legs that don't ache after a day of chasing kids . . . and arms that don't flap in the breeze, but are strong enough to carry a screaming toddler out of the candy aisle in the grocery store. I'd also like a waist, since I lost mine somewhere in the seventh month of my last pregnancy.

Well, Santa, the buzzer on the dryer is ringing and my son saw my feet under the laundry room door. I think he wants his crayon back. Have a safe trip and remember to leave your wet boots by the chimney and come in and dry off by the fire so you don't catch cold. Help yourself to cookies on the table, but don't eat too many or leave crumbs on the carpet. Yours Always, Mom

That's one Mom's perspective. Hear another's.

During the Great Depression, Marjorie Tallcott was married and had one child. The family managed to scrape their way through, but as Christmas approached one year Marjorie and her husband were disappointed that they would not be able to buy any presents. A week before Christmas they explained to their six-year-old son, Pete, that there would be no store-bought presents this Christmas. "But I'll tell you what we can do," said Pete's father, "we can draw pictures of the presents we'd like to give to each other."

That was a busy week. Marjorie and her husband set to work. Christmas Day arrived and the family rose to find their skimpy little tree made magnificent by the picture presents they had adorned it with. There was luxury beyond imagination in those pictures a black limousine and red speedboat for Dad, a diamond bracelet and fur coat for Mom, a camping tent and a swimming pool for Pete. Then Pete pulled out his present, a crayon drawing of a man, a woman and a child with their arms around each other laughing. Under the picture was just one word: "US." Years later Marjorie writes that it was the richest, most satisfying Christmas they ever had. (1)

Pete's card summed it up. "Us."

If you have had a chance to watch the NBC series 'This Is Us' you will catch a glimpse of another family's life. This morning I want to spend some time thinking about the family gathered in this room. This is Us. This is God's family gathered in this room.

This is the kind of picture God presents to us on Christmas Day. Here is what God's Christmas Card written by John said, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

Christmas is an act of God, not of humanity. God acted in the only way that God could have acted without taking away our freedom. God came to us in the form of a tiny baby. And God told us who we are: God's own children. We don't need to fear anything. We belong to God.

God gave us what we most needed—a family. God told us who we are. "We are a family even if we have never been married, if we have been and are not now, if we are left behind by one who has gone on to be with the Lord, if we never knew our birth parents and grew up on our own. This is us."

This child in a manger is the world's most decisive baby. He can remake our lives. We

can be born again, anew, from above. We can be free from fear and anxiety and despair. We don't need to suffer from terror anymore. We don't need to be subject to the powers and principalities which threaten to tear our lives apart.. We can be whole, saved, redeemed! This child born in a manger who grew to be a Savior cannot only change our lives, he can change our world.

There is hope for peace, not because we are armed to the teeth and therefore consider ourselves strong, but in spite of our arms and power. When Jesus walks through our lives into our world people begin to treat each other with respect. There is justice and dignity for every person. His kingdom can take shape right in the midst of the kingdoms of this world, which rattle their sabers, perpetuate injustices and demean their own citizens. Our world will change when the miracle of Bethlehem, the Word, walks through our market places, our homes and the systems around which we organize life.

The Word became flesh is not a sign that the great God has been diminished to the lesser stature of humanity, but that the great God has paid us a visit in human form. The way Paul puts it in the 2nd chapter of Philippians—though he, meaning Jesus, was in the form of God, was one with God the Father, he did not count this state of being as something to hold on to but “EMPTIED” himself, poured himself into human form, taking on our physical limitations of time and space, of getting hungry and tired, of being able to have his heart broken by betrayal and his spirit exasperated by dull wits. It's like an Indy driver riding a tricycle. In Jesus, the very Word of God the verbal expression of who God is took on human form and became incarnate full of grace and truth.

People today are looking for a Word that gives life and comfort and hope, and they are looking right at US to see if that Word has any flesh on its bones.

The Word becoming flesh is a powerful statement about God's presence in Jesus, but it is also more. The Word becoming flesh leads us toward one another, pointing us toward a new community where we see the truth and dignity in all of God's children. The Word becoming flesh reminds us that the truth and light live in us.

Ideas are powerful. But this morning is not about an idea. Books make a difference. But this morning is not about a book.. This morning is not about words, ideas or stories. This morning is about THE WORD. This morning is about a birth, an event, a person. This morning is about THE WORD coming in the flesh SO THAT we can share that word through our flesh and bones, through our hugs and kisses, through our service and worship.

We know none of us are capable of holding all the truth and light, so we need and depend on each other for pieces of the truth and light that we do not yet have.

Anyone who has ever delivered meals or visited the bereaved or responded to a disaster or given sacrificially or taken people in or sat with friends in a difficult time knows that what we give pales in comparison to what we get back. It's not just that the

Word becomes flesh in our actions, but that the Word is already flesh in those to whom we minister.

The courage of a woman who lives alone speaks to us, and the Word becomes flesh. When the faith of a family waiting for the surgeon to come out makes a powerful witness, the Word becomes flesh. When the people who are rebuilding after a storm embody a hope that we desperately needed to see, the Word becomes flesh. When we hear of the passing of a dear friend like our former pastor like Wendy Bailey the Word becomes flesh.

What child is this who is born in relative obscurity, who lived all of his life in a poor occupied country, who went everywhere on foot and during his ministry never traveled outside of his own home country the size of Rhode Island?

What child is this that has most of the known world 2000 years later acknowledges his entrance in to the world every time they write a check and put the date on it?

What Child is this that inspires people all around the world to spend the morning of his birthday exchanging gifts?...who this time tomorrow will have people lined up at Customer Service Counters, EXCHANGING gifts? When I have a birthday I get gifts. When Jesus has a birthday everyone gets gifts!

What Child is this that brings people out of their homes two days in a row to sing old songs they have sung a million times before?

We have a dilemma this morning. We have to find not only an answer to the question, "What Child is This? But also we must answer the question, "What Child is THIS? (pointing to self) Whose Child is This? We need to live in such a way that people are moved to ask, "What CHURCH is This? What FAMILY is this?"

What will I give? What can I give God that God doesn't already have? You can give him you. You can dedicate your life to serving God. You can give more of the one thing you treasure most, your time, your allegiance, your presence in God's house for worship, your assistance at the side of a friend in need, time spent in communication with God through prayer.

What will you give to God in response to what God has given you? This Christmas, why not give back to God a gift that is priceless? Why not give him YOU? How about living in such a way that when you come face to face with the WORD who became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth He will have known you down here below and HE will be prompted to ask, "What or maybe even, Whose Child Is This?"

Jesus is God's gift to us. What we do about it is our gift to God. When we receive God's gift, we can, in turn, BECOME something far greater than anything that will fit under a tree. We can live in such a way that when our time comes, like it did for Wendy

Bailey on Tuesday night, our lives will have moved Jesus to say about us, as I am sure he did with Wendy, This is my child. That's ...what child is this!

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank you for the priceless gift of your Son our savior. We cannot express what it means to be forgiven and given the promise of eternal life. We thank you that you gave that gift without any strings attached. We thank you that that gift is never in short supply and that no one is unable to afford the gift of your son.

We pray that we might be more aware of those around us who need to know of the gift awaiting them in Jesus Christ. We pray that in the year to come that we will be available and ready to share what you have meant and mean in our lives. We pray that in our work, in our leisure, in our play and in our service that we will remain mindful of your gift to us.

We pray for those who are in need beyond the need for a savior. There are so many who are in the cold and lonely, who are lost and clueless. May we be a beacon of light in their darkness. May we reach out in love. May you break through the prisons of their own making.

We pray for those who are in need of your healing, for those we know and for those we don't. Lord, as you healed so many during your incarnation as one of us, now heal again.

We pray for comfort for those who have lost loved ones since last Christmas. Tonight we pray for the family of Rev. Wendy Bailey, former pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Baytown who completed her baptism when she joined the church triumphant this week.

We pray for the family of Carol and Ginger Johnson in the loss of their newborn Great Granddaughter Ailee Marie Douglas.. Please lift their daughter Stacy and her husband Russ and their Granddaughter Katelyn and her husband Dakota in their time of grief and recovery.

We pray that peace on earth will reign this day both in our hearts and in our world. We pray for the survivors of last year's Tsunami as they continue to piece together their lives. We pray for the survivors of Katrina and Rita and the earthquakes in Pakistan. We pray for the families that have lost so much that this world has to offer. And pray that they may come to know how much Your WORD has to offer.

Hear us as we lift the prayers and praises of those here this morning.

1. Mike Turner, jmtturner58@bellsouth.net, The Rock Baptist