

1 Christmas, Year A 2019
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Isaiah 61:10 – 62:3 Psalm 147:13-21 Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7 John 1:1-18

Today is the fifth day of Christmas, and we have just heard the gospel writer John's Christmas story:

In the beginning was the Word

The difference with John is that immediately we know that there is something very different about John's gospel. There are no sheep, no angels, no manger. Mary and Joseph are not named, and Jesus is referred to as "the Word," with a capital W. **This** is John's birth story.

The other gospels begin the story of Jesus' life with his humanity, and places us in local fields, in a small town, in a stable. John begins with Jesus' divinity, and places us at creation – THE creation and beginning of all that is.

*In the beginning was the Word
And the Word was with God
And the Word was God;
He was in the beginning with God.*

John gives us the co-eternal with the Father part of our Lord. Jesus is human and divine – one being with two natures – and Jesus is God. We can ponder and pray these words for a lifetime and probably more

Especially since we live in a culture and at a time when "the stuff" of our lives is made with a planned obsolescence, making a difficult reality even harder to grasp.

The scandal of Christianity – have you heard that term? – is that God broke through the bonds of heaven and came down to earth. In those "Left Behind" books, the theology is that God is going to lift some of us up, one by one, and leave the rest behind. The scandalous reality is that God **comes to us** to save us. God is no longer safely in the clouds or in some other place, but right here with us on

earth. We are now in a time of waiting (and have been since the Resurrection) for God, Jesus – to return.

Notice that many of the words in this part gospel's prologue are plural; God sent Jesus not to choose one and leave another, but to save all of God's people, all of God's creation – as a whole, as a community. We are a *people* of God.

The ongoing scandalous nature of God-with-us in Paul's letter to the Galatians is that Paul is testifying that Jesus came to us to save everyone. Jesus came first to a Jewish town in a Jewish world, and from the beginning, outsiders to the faith have discovered (recognized) who Jesus is. Shepherds, wise people/men, women – foreigners and those who matter least in society are within God's bonds of love and within the saving power of Jesus Christ. Paul, raised Jewish and a devoted persecutor of Christians, was forever changed when God overturned his life on a road to Damascus and revealed to Paul the love of God for all of God's creation. We have in our hands, then, this letter that makes the radical statement that in Christ there is no longer slave or free, Jew or Christian. We are *all* alike in being within the realm of God's love. How quickly you have strayed, Paul writes, from the true gospel. Stand firm, people! (Galatians is a wonderful letter; in it we experience how angry Paul is at the people of Galatia. It is a great book to read and study.)

We, having found the Christ child, find ourselves in a new place. Our new place comes from an ancient, eternal, mystery: that we experience God not in clouds and fire on a mountaintop, but in flesh and blood right here among us.

Our challenge is to be messengers of the scandal of Christianity.

The gospel message does not go forward without witnesses like John the Baptizer, the gospel writer John, and us. John the baptizer says look for another; Jesus is coming. John the gospel writer says Jesus has always been in existence and is part of creation and that we cannot separate Jesus from God; they are one.

I wonder where each of us has found God in the faith community this past year, or in our time together? How do we share the good news, the life-changing, world-changing news that God has broken through heaven and come to earth because God loves us so much? How do we introduce others to God through Jesus?

The prophet Isaiah is of great help to us in carrying out our mission. We can, each day, “put on” the nature of Jesus as if is a coat, a garment. Imagine putting on that

clothing as you dress each day. Put on mercy and justice. Put on Christ and then face the world.

*for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,*

For Zion's sake I shall not keep silent ...

You shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give.

Abram and Sarai's names changed when they met God and made a covenant with God; we know their new names to be Abraham and Sara.

Paul's name was changed from Saul to Paul when we heard from God.

Our name changes to "Christian" at our baptism, when we renounce all that is not God and all that is not of God. We turn into a specific direction, that of being followers of Jesus Christ.

Live the scandal. Look at the stars one night; experience the stars, the heavens, perhaps from a blanket in the grass Know that the same God who

*counts the number of the stars **
and calls them all by their names

Is the same God who comes to us:

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Carry God into the new year. Carry the love of Jesus with you into the new year. Put on the armor of God and wear the cloak/coat of mercy and justice.

Bring the light of a starry night into a world that sees only the darkness. Show the world/our neighbors that darkness did not and does not overcome the light of the stars that God made, the stars that God numbers, the light that Christ brings to the world. Claim the scandal; share the scandal:

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.