

This Sunday's texts:

Isaiah 52:7-10

Hebrews 1:1-4

John 1:1-14

**To All Who Receive Him**

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**December 25, 2022**

The Gospel reading for today is from the Gospel of John 1: 1-14:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through Him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came into that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This Is the Word of Our Lord. Thanks be to God.

Good morning and Merry Christmas! Such a joy to gather together on Christmas day, to worship, to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the word of God that was made flesh and dwelt among us! I will say one of my gifts to you all this morning is going to be a short message. It's such a gift for me to see so many of you, especially some of you who are here from out of town, folks I've known for years here joining in with family. It is such a blessing that God weaves us together through his Holy Spirit as one family. No matter whether we're here or we spread out, He keeps us united to one another. That is such a gift.

Now this morning, we're going to look at my personal favorite telling of the Christmas story. I'm not sure if it even maybe clicked with you that that's what we read this morning. It's a rather unique version of the story, isn't it? In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, we get a more traditional telling of the story. Mark doesn't give us the Christmas story at all. And John gives us a very unique telling, a theological telling of the Christmas story. While Luke and Matthew get into the

nitty-gritty details of it, of a virgin pregnant with child, of a census. Apparently, bureaucracy gets its hands even on the Christmas story. Not a surprise. There was an inn and a manger, shepherds, angels, and wise men.

Yet John doesn't tell us about any of this. Rather than getting into the specifics of the story, he digs into the significance of the story, that God Himself, the One who through whom all things were made, the Word of God, the Light that shines in the darkness which cannot be overcome. That Word took on human flesh and dwelt among us. Here's what it says to us about that child born on Christmas Day, that baby lying in a manger. To all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God.

In Acts 20:35, we have one of the few places in the New Testament that contains words of Jesus Christ that are found outside of the Gospels. It's actually one of the most popular sayings of Jesus that we find in the book of Acts. You can actually probably finish the sentence for me. Let's try it. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It's one of those things that we just know in our heart of hearts to be true. It resonates with our experience. I think even people who wouldn't consider themselves Christian, who don't follow Jesus, can resonate with the sentiment. When I am generous, when I give to others, it makes me feel good about myself. In this phrase, Jesus gives us an accurate description of what it is like to be a human. I think that's why he says it.

But I think there's a problem with what Jesus says. Perhaps you're like "all right, Joe is going off the rails." The problem isn't with Jesus. It's not even with what he said. The problem is with us actually because we can take a saying like this and sometimes we take it to a bit of an ungodly place. Here's what I mean. We start to be generous. We give. We feel good about that generosity. Then we start to get proud. You start to feel like we are the Haves and other people are the Have-Nots. At its worst, it can make us feel like we don't have a need. Like I'm doing fine and it's other people in need. This way of thinking becomes dangerous when we start turning it away, especially from our relationships with others and towards our relationship with God. You might even start to think that we have something to offer God, but not all that much left to receive.

I remember, years ago, I was in college and I had a friend of mine. I wasn't feeling well. I was a little bit under the weather, not too bad, but I was feeling under the weather. This friend asked if they could pray for me and said, "Hey, do you have anything I can pray for you for?" I said, "No, I'm fine" and he responded with something that I've never forgotten. He said, "Are you telling me that you don't need anything from God?" It stuck with me.

The Christmas story is a reminder to us that while it is true, it truly is more blessed to give than to receive, there's also a way in which it isn't. So I want to offer a new phrase to you this Christmas day and I hope it sticks with you. Here it is. **It is more blessed to receive than to give.** It is more blessed to receive than to give.

Here's what John 1:12 says, "To all who receive him [that is, Jesus] to all who receive him, to those who believe in His name, He gives the right to become children of God." With our relationships with others, with one another, it truly is a blessed thing to be generous, to be unselfish, to give. But it is especially blessed when we understand that the only things we have to give are things that we have first received from our Lord. So this Christmas, let's remember that before our God, we have nothing to offer. We have no gift that we could bring that would make us right before Him. There's nothing we could do that could make us more deserving of the love that He so lavishly pours out on us. There is nothing we can do to be worthy of the gift that He has given us in His son, Jesus Christ. Yet our God gives. He gives and gives and gives and all that we have before God, we have by His grace. All we can do is receive. Think about it. The Magi, those wise men, traveled from the East and they came with their precious and costly gifts. But I have to imagine that on that day the wise men walked away having received far more than they gave.

One Sunday, at my internship church, a man came up to me after I had preached and he said, "Joe, can you tell me the three main points of your sermon?" Put me on the spot. You know what I said? "No, I can't, and here's why. I try to make it a habit to preach one point-sermons, so I could tell you the one." And I did and luckily for me, he said, "Yeah, that's what I got from it." So for you today, what's the one point?

It is more blessed to receive than to give because you and I don't have anything which we haven't first received from our God. The most blessed thing in this life is something that we must and can only receive from the One who came on Christmas Day, the Word made flesh and dwelt among us, the right to become the children of God. So today, receive God's gift, the gift that he offers in Jesus.

And today, as you come forward to the Lord's Table, I encourage you to remember just how much has been given for you. As you come to the table, remember not that you come because you are deserving, but we come because we've been invited, and that, at that table, the most valuable thing of all, the Word made flesh is given for you and given to you, not because you're worthy, not because you've earned it, but because you are loved.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we stand in awe of your love for us, God, that it is so unlike the loves we experience in this world, that it is whole, that it is complete, that it is not lacking in any way, and that you give it unreservedly to us. Lord, give us the faith, today, through your son, Jesus Christ to know that we have been made your beloved children this Christmas Day. Lord, that you are our Father, that you love us dearly. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.