

Christmas Day  
John 1:1-14  
December 25, 2016  
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## God With Us And Within Us

Merry Christmas!

I'm so glad to see you all here today! And a significant shout-out for those of you who were also here yesterday for one of our Christmas Eve services, whether you participated in that enchanting, and somewhat controlled-chaos of our Christmas pageant, or our later service, with the beautiful singing from the choir before and during our glorious Eucharistic celebration. All the energy of our Christmas Eve services centered around Luke's magnificent gospel telling of Jesus' miraculous birth.

And today we experience another aspect of Christmas, a quieter, but remarkably expansive perspective of the incarnation that comes to us through John's gospel, what a 2nd century bishop, Clement of Alexandria called, "the spiritual gospel." Today's reading takes us beyond a world that we can directly experience with our senses, and instead leads us, through its poetry, to a deeper understanding of our Incarnate Lord.

*In the beginning.* These first words of John's Gospel are also found in the book of Genesis, the very first book of the Bible. And these three little words actually encompass much more than we may realize from reading our English translations.

I had an Old Testament professor at seminary who explained that when you read these three words in the ancient Hebrew text, there's a sense that you're starting in the middle of the story. It's as if there's an ellipsis, those 3 dots that we sometimes find in written dialogue or a description of a narrator's thoughts, which gives us the sense of a pause, of time passing, before that dialogue once again continues.

So those words, *in the beginning*, aren't really the beginning. For before the start of of it all — the beginning of time, of creation, of a cosmos, of a world, and all that was in it — before all that, God existed. God was and is, and is to come, and then — only then — was there a beginning of creation.

That Hebrew context, that same sense of *in the beginning*, is reflected in John's Gospel. In that pre-existence before existence, that time before time, there was the Word, and the Word was with God, the Word was God, and all that was and is and will be created, comes through the Word.

When I hear these words, when I take the time to really listen, I get an inkling of the magnitude of God. The God who created all that is around us — in its remarkable complexity and beauty — God who creates with breath and love became human, so that we can find new life, new identities, and a new wholeness through faith in Christ.

John's Gospel seeks to help us grasp the concept of both God-beyond and God-within. While we celebrate one aspect of the wonder of our Lord and Savior at Christmas, his birth, we cannot

truly fathom the importance of this event to all humankind, without trying to hold on to the inconceivable enormity of that moment in time.

God's own self has inhabited our flesh and walked among us and Jesus shows us, tells us, who God is. Jesus tells us that God heals, forgives, welcome the outcasts, and prays for those who hurt him. Jesus understands betrayal and denial, suffering and pain, humiliation and death. Jesus tells us that God knows that, both as individuals and as a world, we need a Savior; and Jesus is that Savior. In Christ, God brings victory over despair, destruction, and death; and God wills and shares that victory with us, with all of humanity, and all God's creation. Jesus shows us the way to live life to the fullest, through growing into understanding that we are all beloved children of God.

This is the gift of Christmas: a new identity, a new opportunity, a new humanity, all given to us through God in Christ. This gift of grace is for all — a gift for us to not only know deep within our hearts, but to share and joyfully pass along on to all we encounter, both during this season of joy, as well as throughout the year.

How do we challenge ourselves to live our lives more fully in Christ?

We can begin by examining how we think about and act towards those around us. Do we truly recognize in all others their gift of God-within? It may take us getting out of our comfort zones, by getting involved in ministries like Family Promise, Arrendale Prison, and the Honduras Mission, or getting active in our Diocesan Beloved Community, which can help us to better understand today's issues around race, so that we can build relationships and come to know others, living into what it really means to love our neighbor.

We can challenge ourselves to tune out those constant cultural messages urging us to want more and more. I know this sounds a bit crazy, considering what we may have sitting under our Christmas trees, but what could happen if we limited, even a little, the gratification of our material desires and instead shared more freely with others? Could we help make the world a better place for all our brothers and sisters, for all our children and future generations? Could wanting less, also help us to better care for this earth and all its resources?

And finally, we can step away from fear and uncertainty, even in troubling times, knowing our Lord and Savior is always with us and within us, strengthening us, comforting us, leading us, through the power of his all encompassing love.

Jesus came to show us how to live. He is our example, and we are called to follow in his steps, treating one another, and all God's creation, with respect, compassion, caring, and love. For God's own presence is with us, and within us — all of us, all of humanity — with our every breath.

John's gospel tells us that 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."

Let us all go forth in the power of the Spirit to live our lives to the fullest in Christ by loving God and loving our neighbor. Amen.