**1/5/25**

**Three Song References in One Sermon**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**John 1:[1-9] 10-18 (NRSVUE)**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSVUE) (2) **Amen.**

Welcome back on this day before Epiphany as we are reminded that it still is Christmas. As you look around the church you can see that we still have our Advent Wreath and our Christmas Trees fully lit. Our other Christmas decorations are still up. The paraments are still white to mark this continued season of 12 days following Christmas. Now, some churches may have switched the readings out for today, and some churches may even have services tonight or tomorrow to commemorate the last set of visitors in our nativity scene that actually arrive tomorrow. The three kings follow the star and bring their gifts fit for a king. As this very season comes to an end we continue to rejoice and be thankful for all that we have learned and experienced. As thankful as we are for this very gift born unto all of us, this gift that we celebrate each and every year, we also are very aware of the need to be continually readying ourselves for His second act, for His return on the clouds. The best and most outstanding gift is yet to come as we receive everlasting life as a result of our very faith and belief. So, please be reminded that we need to keep Christmas alive in our hearts all year long, and not just for these few short days that are on our calendars. We as Christians look forward in the continual hope and love to the commitment that He made to each and every one of us. The best is yet to come!

Now, I will admit that after my initial studying and reading I really had no clue what direction this sermon was going to go in. Today’s reading is not as straight forward, or not as much of a story as we are used to. Yes, there are undoubtedly some very definitive points, but those points seem like they have to be dug out a little bit in my mind. I think that is why I struggled a bit with composing something to present and share with you all. I will also admit that this Gospel Reading would have probably been rather easy for me to just glance on over, or just take the general point and move on from it if I did not have to write a sermon. So, that is the very reason as to why I am so thankful for you and this community each and every week. It stretches me, and it has me dig in an effort to grow for myself, for you, and in respect to our Triune God as well. I of course have a responsibility, and I have made a promise, and I again thank you for your continued commitment to this community of faith in these very pews and on the conference call as you all actually hold me accountable.

Alright, I would venture that we are all probably familiar with several songs that we hear often around this time of year. In the song I am thinking of here I would venture that we can probably picture some lights displays or figures that reflect it. This song or carol I am thinking of though actually has many hidden meanings that many may not even realize. Furthermore, most people may not realize that this song was initially composed as a bunch of poems and transitioned into a song or carol in response to faith and religious practices being banned in “sixteenth-century England.” (9) Now, some of you may be scratching your heads out there and thinking what song I might be speaking of, and some of you may very well know the song I am referring to because of the few hints that I have given you. Regardless, if you know the song yet or not, what I found even more interesting during my research is the very fact that “each year, PNC Bank calculates the cost of purchasing all the gifts mentioned in the classic carol “The Twelve Days of Christmas.”

(So,) Here's a breakdown of the costs for each gift:

A Partridge in a Pear Tree: $370.18 ($20.18 for the partridge

and $350 for the pear tree)

Two Turtle Doves: $750

Three French Hens: $346.50

Four Calling Birds: $599.96

Five Gold Rings: $1,245

Six Geese-a-Laying: $900

Seven Swans-a-Swimming: $13,125

Eight Maids-a-Milking: $58 (federal minimum wage)

Nine Ladies Dancing: $8,557.37

Ten Lords-a-Leaping: $15,579.65

Eleven Pipers Piping: $3,714.96

Twelve Drummers Drumming: $4,016.85” (9)

Now, with all those numbers and items that I just listed you may very well be wondering what the entire cost is, that is unless you happened to get out a calculator really quickly, or you happen to have a very strong math minded brain. Well, here it is, “the total cost is $49,263, reflecting a 5.4% increase from the previous year.” (9) I mean who would even imagine spending nearly Fifty-thousand dollars on all of these items?

So, now that I have provided you with all those useless figures, I want to redirect your focus onto the real meaning of the song, and for that fact the real meaning of this season of Christmas. For in this season of light and hope the cards dealt us a lot of song references with the first Gospel Reading of 2025. You may have actually caught on to that if you happened to glance over the preface to the Gospel Reading as it states that, “John begins his gospel with this prologue: a hymn to the Word through whom all things were created. This Word became flesh and brought grace and truth to the world.” (1) If we really think about that preface right there then we come to realize that despite this sounding as if it were the beginning to the book of Genesis, we were actually getting a hymn to introduce us to our God and so much more.

We even get to hear yet again about John the Baptizer. Now, one may wonder why this is such an important detail. Well, when God came in human form to this very earth then one also needs the way paved ahead, and we learned about that a few weeks ago. We also learned that the message and ministry Jesus presented and conducted here on earth were very confusing or even frustrating to some, and I believe that is because they were stuck waiting versus experiencing that which was right in front of them. So, John coming along before Jesus to prepare the way should have had more people awake and ready for the message, and not denying it or totally missing it. People should have been ready for Jesus’ presence for the light and truth was here.

Then, we get introduced to something that some people cannot seem to fathom to this day, or even seem to want accept. That being the very fact that everyone and any one can become children of God through their belief. There is no work or other standard. We do not have to be of some classification or of some family lineage. We simply have to come to God and believe! Nothing more and nothing less! It was and continues to be confirmed that all creation could become one with Him. “If we understand “grace” as “gift,” then the Word, giver of light and life, now incarnate, is filled with a new gift, truth. The giving and receiving of this gift of truth is intimately connected to the power to become children of God.” (5)

We hear more about the very relevance of Christ coming to this very earth in our last paragraph of this Gospel Reading as well. We hear that Jesus came to be one, just like you and I, to fulfill scripture. He came to confirm the Law that was provided to Moses and given to each and every one of us in The Ten Commandments. We know that these laws are to be followed to the best of our ability. However, without Jesus coming to this very earth and being one like you and I the very Law would have condemned each and every one of us. We would have no hope, we would have no grace or forgiveness. We would just be living unfulfilling and defeated lives. This is precisely why this particular atonement had to occur. Everyone in and through Christ has been blessed by His very coming down to us so that we do not need to keep grasping at rungs trying to climb a ladder that we would never ever reach the top of. That right there is a little Martin Luther thought process and reality coming out of me.

So, “Verse 18 concludes and yet encapsulates the Prologue. It is a (restatement) ~~recapitulation~~ of the first verse addressing again who Jesus is, what Jesus’ relationship with God is like, and where Jesus comes from.” (7) A total summary of all of its parts dealt to us in the very last verse. A rephrasing that we may or may not need, but put there for the very purpose to hopefully ensure we did not miss out on all these very vital points.

Now don’t you go thinking that I forgot about “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” I did not forget the promise to share with you those very encoded items that are within that song’s real meaning and purpose. “Jesus, the Son of God, Christ is symbolically presented as a mother partridge, the only bird that will die to protect its young. Two Turtledoves represent the Old and New Testaments. Three French hens signify faith, hope, and love. Calling birds represent the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Gold rings represent the first five books of the Old Testament, known as the Torah or the Pentateuch. Six Geese a-laying is related to each day in creation, a time when the world was “hatched” or formed by God. Swans a-swimming represent the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and compassion. Maids a-milking are the eight who were blessed being the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. Ladies dancing were really the gifts known as the Nine fruit of the Spirit being love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Lords a-leaping represented lords that were judges and in charge of the law, this being code for the Ten Commandments. Pipers piping marks when Judas betrayed Jesus and committed suicide, and there only being eleven men who carried out the gospel message. Lastly, drummers drumming are the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostles’ Creed.” (9) That is pretty cool, huh?

With all that said and served up here today “I again wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.... May you truly experience the grace and truth that was intended when the Word became flesh.” (10) May you also experience all there is to behold in the very words of our Closing Hymn. There you have it, a third song reference from me in one sermon! I encourage you to sing on and sing out later as we announce, proclaim, and rejoice; Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn king!"

**Amen and Amen.**

**References & Study Points**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year C 2025

 January 5th, 2025

 Second Sunday of Christmas

(2) BibleGateway.com

(3) The Four Pages of The Sermon

 Revised and Updated

 A Guide to Biblical Preaching

 Paul Scott Wilson

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 Abingdon Press

(4) WorkingPreacher.org

 Second Sunday of Christmas

 No matter what the confused world does, the response of the Word is glory, grace,

 love, and life

 January 5, 2025

 Commentary on John 1:[1-9], 10-18

 Meda Stamper

(5) WorkingPreacher.org

 Second Sunday of Christmas

 The term “prologue” comes from the Greek logos, meaning “word” but connoting

 “speech” or “study,” and the prefix pro, meaning “before.”

 January 5, 2020

 Commentary on John 1:[1-9], 10-18

 Sherri Brown

(6) WorkingPreacher.org

 Second Sunday of Christmas (Year C)

 John’s prologue is very juicy, theologically, and it begins by celebrating God’s

 incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth, the Word of God.

 January 3, 2016

 Commentary on John 1:[1-9], 10-18

 Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez

(7) WorkingPreacher.org

 Second Sunday of Christmas

 1:(1-9), 10-18 is the assigned Gospel lesson for Christmas 2, Years A, B, and C.

 January 4, 2015

 Commentary on John 1:[1-9], 10-18

 Karoline Lewis

(8) WorkingPreacher.org

 Second Sunday of Christmas

 When I was a kid, I was sick a lot.

 January 5, 2014

 Commentary on John 1:[1-9], 10-18

 Karyn Wiseman

(9) The Surprise Meaning Behind "The 12 Days of Christmas" Lyrics

 Ace Collins

 Author

 Updated

 Dec 16, 2024

 https://www.crosswalk.com/special-coverage/christmas-and-advent/the-twelve-days-

 of-christmas.html

(10) 1/3/16

 Caution & Challenge

 John 1:(1-9), 10-18

 Vincent Piekarski

**John 1:[1-9] 10-18 (NRSVUE)**

 John begins his gospel with this prologue: a hymn to the Word through whom all

 things were created. This Word became flesh and brought grace and truth to the

 world.

 [1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was

 God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through

 him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being

 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the

 darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

 6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a

 witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself

 was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which

 enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.]

 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world

 did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not

 accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave

 power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of

 the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

 14 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. 15 (John testified to him

 and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks ahead

 of me because he was before me.’ ”) 16 From his fullness we have all received,

 grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth

 came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son,

 himself God, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.