



PASTOR GWEN'S MESSAGE
2ND SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS
"A NEW YOU"
SUNDAY JANUARY 2, 2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Happy New Year! If you are like me, I like new beginnings. It is always interesting to start something new, to learn something different or just get away from the same old same old.

Our Gospel text for today begins, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Wow, John really knows how to kick off a Gospel. Those few words have inspired theologians to write many books, musicians to compose music and artists to paint masterpieces. All these efforts are attempts to understand Jesus in a more profound and larger way.

Since, I went to college to be a music teacher, I can understand this as it is like writing a symphony where the opening overture introduces the themes of the complete work. Then later in the piece, the composer will go into greater detail of each new theme that is introduced. And somehow by the end of the piece, the "revelation" of the complete idea is expressed.

Well in our first 18 verses in John's Gospel we have many themes introduced. The first being the pre-existence of the Word. This comes in the first 2 verses. Next God and Word or Father and Son are distinctive yet one. Jesus as God is also revealed here. We then have life coming from Jesus, verse 4 and the power of light over the darkness, verse 6. The relationship between Jesus and

John the Baptist is another theme we hear in verses 6-8. We also hear that Jesus, the Word made flesh will be rejected in verse 11. God's glory is a miracle that is being given to us in verse 14 and we conclude this section in verse 18 in the revealing that Jesus is the only Son of God.

Having all these themes is a paradise for preachers to choose from. What spoke to me this week was the first line of our reading and verse 14. "In the beginning was God and He became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth. God and His Son Jesus were both present at creation and came to live among us. And He is still present in our lives today. That is why Christmas is such an important holiday. We need to celebrate the fact that Jesus came to earth to share our humanity. So even if you were surprised to see that we are still celebrating Christmas on January 2nd, know that it is important to recall that Jesus came into our lives one night so many centuries ago.

Christmas eve when we gathered to worship our newborn king as told by the Gospel of Luke, we never tire of hearing that story of how a young couple in a far way land had a baby in a manger where shepherds came to see what had happened. The details never get old, but today we hear the same story with a different flare from the Gospel writer John. John weaves theology into poetry with deep spiritual meaning. He tells us that Jesus was there at creation, even before there was a Bethlehem or a manger.

Sometimes it is hard to grasp this concept as it is so huge. Jesus was in heaven with the Father and the Holy Spirit, but then came down from heaven in the form of a human baby. He walked among the people, even though He was God, so He could experience our life, a life filled with hunger, thirst, laughter, sadness, firsts and lasts. He even allowed himself to be teased, tormented, and put to death on a rugged cross. Certainly, in his 33 years as a human on this planet, not all people recognized him as God.

In fact, in the first century, most people had no clue who Jesus was. Even people in Jesus's hometown refused to acknowledge who He was. Yes, Jesus was wiser than most folks of that time and they admired Him for it. But, even after watching a few miracles that He performed, people were hesitant to say He was God. In fact, because they did not know how he did what he did, from healing to changing water into wine, people were suspicious of him. And as we all know how the story goes, it was not long before the religious folks

basically put a bounty on his head and wanted to get rid of him. He was a thorn in their side, one they did not want to deal with.

Those few that recognized Jesus as God, those who believed in Him, He gave amazing power to become His flock. And that was what he came to do. He came to the world to love people into the family of God. Amazing grace was what his life story is all about.

And so, as we begin a New Year, we shall remember that we are not alone. Whether we are starting a new job, going to a new school, starting life as a single person, facing a life-threatening illness, or even starting retirement, we are not alone. None of us needs to start out the New Year alone. If we are believers in Jesus, He promises to be with us every day in the coming year. When our world is darkened, He brings us light. Where our past haunts us, Jesus offers forgiveness. Where our mortality cripples us, He promises us life eternal. We have only to believe that Jesus is the Word made flesh, the only Son of God, to have a future that is filled with blessings and grace.

If you are ready to leave 2021, just wait for what is in store for you in 2022. God gives us all a new beginning. Every day is a new slate to write on. All our failures and sins are wiped away along with shattered promises and broken dreams. God takes it all on himself and remembers it no more. We have a blank canvas to write our new beginning on. And as John has told us, all we must do is to receive it as a gift, and it is ours. 2022 is our new beginning from our loving God. So Happy New Year. Happy New You. Thanks be to God.
AMEN.