

John 1:1-18

If I was a betting person, I'd bet you thought Christmas is over. Hopefully that would be a bet I would lose. Because as Christians we ought to know that the Christmas season doesn't even begin until midnight Dec. 24 and runs for the 12 following days. That's why the Christmas song, "The 12 Days of Christmas". But in the culture in which we live, the Christmas season is over on January 1. I imagine your tree is down, presents unwrapped and put away. If not it will most likely all be done soon. The actual day for taking the tree down is Epiphany, and that is tomorrow. By the way, there is a celebration of the Epiphany of our Lord with the Erie Lutheran Conference tomorrow evening. It will start at 7:00 p.m. at Faith Lutheran Church, 5414 East Lake Road with a service of Holy Communion, followed by Burning of the Christmas Greens. Everyone is welcome!

But back to the message... the story of Christ's birth is told differently in all four gospels... actually 3 of the gospels... Mark's gospel skips over Christ's birth. The nativity story we know so well, with angels, and shepherds, and wise men, is derived from a combination of Matthew and Luke's gospels. Which brings us to today's reading from the Gospel of John. It's not a birth narrative. It's the story behind the coming of Christ. Since all the trappings of our secular Christmas celebration are taken care of, we can concentrate on what really happened on the day of Jesus' birth. God became human. Unfortunately, the very cultural and ethnic group to which he chose to reveal himself rejected him. Which begs the question, "How will we respond to the good news that we are the children of God?"

Jesus, the Word made flesh, was present at the time of creation; our text tells us, "all things came into being through him." He witnessed time before humanity. He witnessed all the interactions Adam and Eve had with God. He witnessed the serpent tricking Adam and Eve into sinning. And he witnessed Adam and Eve's departure from the garden. Yet he never deserted humanity.

There was once a woman named Joyce who loved to have lit candles throughout her home. Her husband wasn't fond of this trait, he was afraid one day the candles would burn the house down. Because of her fondness for candles the couple had purchased a Christ candle to donate to their church. It was sitting in their kitchen, wrapped in brown paper, awaiting its dedication at church the next day.

The couple was hosting their Sunday school class for a party that evening, and as Joyce was lighting candles in preparation, the tip of the match she had struck to light the candle broke off and flew onto the kitchen counter. Even though she searched, Joyce couldn't find it. Then the doorbell rang. Joyce quickly lit the candle with another match and went to answer the door. As the guests were settling in one of the men exclaimed, "There's a fire in the kitchen!" The broken match tip had slowly smoldered until it ignited the brown paper wrapping on the Christ candle. Luckily the guest had seen the flames and Joyce's husband was able to quickly put the fire out with a damp dish towel before any damage was done.

They unwrapped the paper from the Christ candle and the only damage was a black smudge at the base of the candle. He washed the candle and wiped away the smudge as best he could, saying he hoped no one would notice a small smudge at the base of the candle.

The Christ Candle reminds us of "the" light of the world John tells us about in our gospel: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5). Jesus, the Word made flesh, brings light to all humankind. When his light shines upon us, our sins are exposed. But as we confess our sin, and receive God's forgiveness, we find ourselves unwrapped, and washed clean with forgiveness. Jesus lights our lives.

As Jesus was teaching in the temple one day, he spoke to the crowds saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). We have two choices in this life: to continue to walk in the darkness, stumbling over the obstacles of grace; or to walk in the light, being guided by "the light" of God's love.

I recall going to Jumonville, a church camp in southwest Pennsylvania, as a single adult. Our Saturday evening worship always ended with everyone holding a lit gotie candle walking in a circle around the sanctuary singing, "I want to walk as a child of the light; I want to follow Jesus..."

Jesus came so we can know God, but we have the choice to walk the lit path or to stray off into the darkness. We aren't forced to decide to follow Jesus. At times the darkness may feel comforting. It may feel fun. It may feel as though we're getting away with something. Yet the light always shines in the darkness and exposes the deep dark secrets. God knows everything we've ever done since Adam and Eve. We aren't getting away with anything in God's sight.

But, again, because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus we can have the sin washed away and become a new person in Christ. It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter where you've been. It doesn't matter what you've done. Jesus came to shine light into the darkness and wash away our sin. That's the real story behind the birth of Jesus.

All glory be to God!