

*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.*

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On this Third Day of Christmas we celebrate the Feast Day of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist. According to tradition, St. John is the youngest of the disciples, and was probably fairly close in age to Our Lord. He was a part of our Lords' inner-circle, witnessing the changing of water into wine at the marriage in Cana, the Transfiguration, and the raising of Lazarus, among countless other healings and exorcisms. St. John was the only disciple to follow Jesus all the way up to Calvary and stayed with him even as Jesus died on the cross, where he was entrusted with the care of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On Easter morning, St. John outran St. Peter to see the empty tomb. He is the only Disciple to not be martyred, as the risen Lord foretold to St. Peter, *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* After Pentecost, St. John became the Bishop of Ephesus, where he was arrested and the Romans tried to martyr him by boiling him alive in oil. However, according to tradition he survived and was exiled to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. St. John is also credited with having written the Gospel of St. John, and three other Epistles which bear his name. He eventually returned to Ephesus where he died and was buried at the age of 94. St. John is important to the Anglican Church because it is through him that the majority of the Anglican Church traces its Apostolic Succession.

St. John bears the nickname *the Apostle of Light*. This Christmas we read about the birth of God's eternal Word, Jesus Christ, whom St. John the Evangelist called *the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world*. This Light shines as the Life and the Love of God out of Jesus and into John's own heart, so that he calls himself the disciple whom the Lord loved. St. John the Evangelist is illuminated by Christ the Light and what he sees is nothing other than the Life of God the Father as Love in God the Son.

Because of his emphasis on the Light, Divinity, and Love of God, St. John is often criticized for being the most mystical, other-worldly, and transcendental of the Apostles. The argument goes that if the other Gospel writers were overemphasizing Jesus' humanity, then John was surely determined to add a heavy dose of Christ's divinity. But this is an over simplification. John does emphasize the mystically Divine nature of Christ. But he goes on to tell us that the Divine Word, *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness,*

*and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.)* So a more accurate picture of St. John reveals the Apostle who truly grasps and embraces Christ's *Light* as *Love* precisely because it has been shown to him through Christ's humanity. St. John drives home the message, Jesus, God who become man, is the only way back to God. *The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Perhaps it is this understanding of the Life, Light, and Love of God through Jesus Christ that causes St. John to stay by our Lord's side even as He made His way up Calvary. After all, *that which we have looked upon, that which our hands have handled* is life changing. Perhaps this is also how from a simple fisherman comes some of the most profound words in all of Scripture, because the Word that was made flesh, was made flesh in the heart of St. John. We too can begin to allow *the Word of God to be made flesh* in our hearts and souls. His message is clear. That *the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us* is God's revelation of how His *Life, Light, and Love* save us in Jesus Christ. *This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.*

In the heart of Jesus John has *seen* how God's *Light* has triumphed over all *darkness*. He *speaks* the truth of this *Word made flesh* to us that we might *hear* and have fellowship with God. Yet he reminds us that, *If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not know the truth: but if we walk in the Light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. To walk in the Light of God* is to participate in Jesus Christ's victory over all *darkness* and evil. To *walk in the Light of God* is to be touched and handled by the bright beams of His truth that bring only godly fellowship and goodwill, and casts out sin.

St. John makes clear an often overlooked message of Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ begins the victory over death and sin. From the Nativity of Jesus Christ, to His earthly ministry, to His death and resurrection the rays of God's *Light* and *Love* were spread over the earth, enlightening the hearts and minds of those who were able to receive Him. This *Light* still shines in the darkness of our world. St. John witnessed firsthand the *Life, Light and Love* of Christ. He would have us remember that if we are to be true followers of Jesus, we must allow His *Life, Light and Love* to transform us.

At the end of St. John's life, he had lived to such an old age that it was with great difficulty that his disciples carried him to church, and being unable to say much, he was known to repeat each time to the congregation the simple words: *Little children, love one another.* Eventually his disciples weary of hearing these words, asked him, *Master, why do you repeat these same words so often?* And he answered, *because it is the commandment of the Lord, and if this only be done, it is enough.* Amen.