



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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December 25, 2007

The Festival of the Nativity of Our Lord

John 1:1-14

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 52:7-10

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 98

Second Lesson: Hebrews 1:1-9

Gospel: John 1:1-14

Jesus is the Great Christmas Light

How many of you put up some kind of Christmas lights this year? You didn't have to crawl all over your roof. You didn't have to make your roof flash or things like that, but did you put up a light some place, on a tree, in a window? Anybody here not put up a light any place?

Did you see any interesting Christmas light displays this year as you drove around? I noticed coming home the other night there was a pretty neat one coming out of Maribel along the side of the road. That one was pretty interesting. And in all the windshield time we put in this last week, I saw a number of different ones that caught my eye and I thought were pretty neat. But none of them compare to the ones I saw on a television show about Christmas lights. Some of these people have so many lights on their house that in the month or so that they have them up, they spend over \$1,000 extra in electricity. Not on the lights, but just the electricity. Some guy down in Florida goes so far as to paint his yard white so he has the white Christmas look. As far as I'm concerned, he can have the white Christmas look. I would just as soon have the heat.

But the lights, I think, are fascinating because for you and me, as Christians, when we see all these lights; you drive around, you see them here in church, you see them out in people's yards; at this time of the year, it reminds us of what we hear over and over. We heard it last night in the candlelight service from Isaiah. A Light shines in the darkness. We hear it again this morning in our gospel from John. The true Light was coming into the world. We hear Jesus himself later on say it. "I am the Light of the world." Every one of these lights we see, whether it's blinking or not, whether it's red, green, yellow, blue or whatever the case may be, is a reminder to you and me, as Christians, that Jesus is the Christmas Light. He is the reason we hang all these lights. He is the Light that shines in the darkness. He is the Word that became flesh so that you and I can bask in his Light eternally in heaven.

That's the glorious truth that we are here to celebrate today. God became flesh. True God from all eternity became the Christmas Light that entered into the world. As we remember and reflect on what God said through John this morning, we see he is a unique light, but even more importantly, he is a light that is full of grace and truth because you and I need grace, and we need truth.

It's pretty obvious as you listen to what John says here as he starts his gospel, that Jesus is unique. He calls Jesus the Word. If you just take out the phrase "the Word" in there and replace it with "Jesus," you see what he is saying. In the beginning was

Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. Nothing was made that has been made that wasn't made through him. Jesus became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory and so on. We know he is talking about Jesus just because that's how John talks. But think about the first passage you probably ever learned. I'm guessing one of the first passages you ever learned was "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son," right? And you see that same phrase being used by John here. "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only." So we see that he is talking about Jesus. The Word became flesh. He was born in Bethlehem.

He, who was born in Bethlehem, who didn't appear to be anything different than any other newborn that night, was absolutely unique in the history of the world. You and I can see that from our perspective. The shepherds knew that he was something special, but they knew it because the angels came and told them "Here is the sign. Go see this, then you will know what is going on." But I don't think when they went home they were saying, "Boy, he didn't look like a human baby, did he?" They knew because they were told.

You and I know because we have been told. He is unique because everything was made through him. The One that was born in time is timeless. The One who had to be fed by Mary is the One who created everything in this world. That makes him absolutely unique, unlike any other light that we will ever see. He is unique because he is true God from all eternity and yet he became flesh. I can't understand completely how he can be God and man at the same time, and I don't think any of us really can understand it completely, but God tells us that and I believe it. Because that is exactly what you and I needed. We needed a Savior who was man so he could be under the law to live in our place, because you and I cannot keep God's law perfectly. You and I, I'll guarantee you, you can't keep your mind from wandering during this Sermon however long or however short it is, am I right? You wander.

Now think about not being able to pay attention for 10-12 minutes and think, are you going to spend your whole lifetime devoting yourself and paying attention to God's law and never slipping up at all? It isn't going to happen. The reason is because you don't have a chance because you were born sinful. So we need God to come and become man to be under the law in our place, but we need him to be God so that his life in our place and so that his death in our place counts for everyone. God tells us no man can redeem the life of another. The cost is too much. No payment is ever enough. If he is only a man, he can't pay for your sins and my sins. If he is only a man, he is just a neat teacher, he's just a revolutionary, he's just all of those things that so many people mistake him for. But because he is unique, because he is God and man, the One who created everything that became flesh, his life and his death counts for you and it counts for me and it counts for the whole world. His perfection becomes the world's perfection and then it comes to you and me personally and directly and absolutely as we become his children—not by our decision, not by our will. We didn't choose him, but he, through the Spirit, through water and the Word in baptism, through the Word that we hear, the Spirit works to bring us to faith so that we become his children.

Now we see how incredibly unique Jesus is. He isn't just some plastic thing that sits in manger scenes at this time of the year. He is the living Word of God that makes his dwelling in our hearts. He is the One that takes away our sins. He is the One that takes all those things that we get frustrated with and we get upset about, all the things that we whine about—maybe we didn't get the gift we wanted this year so we pout, maybe things don't go exactly as we want as our family gets together and some of the same problems keep cropping up. All those sins that you and I will commit today, tomorrow and again and again, over and over at other times, Christ took away. That's what makes him unique. He is the One and Only, because only he could do this. Only he could take away our sins. He is absolutely unique in that sense. And he comes to us full of grace and full of truth.

John says, "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." John certainly saw it, didn't he? He got to go up on the Mountain of Transfiguration. He saw his full glory, the divine glory of the God-man revealed. He saw the miracles. He saw the water into wine. He saw Jairus' daughter sit up. He saw the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk. He saw the 5,000 get their bellies full on five loaves of bread and two little fish. He saw Jesus' glory in ways that you and I can only read about. But John points us to where you and I see his glory, doesn't he? He came full of grace and truth.

That grace is what we just talked about—how he has taken away our sins. The undeserved love—you and I don't deserve it. You and I don't have a claim on it. You and I can't say, "God, you owe me this forgiveness. God, you owe me heaven." All we can do is say, "God, forgive me, a sinner." But he comes with his grace and he comes with the truth—the truth that yes, we are sinners. The truth that we don't like to hear, but the truth that we need so desperately to hear, that we so often turn our back on him and yet, when we are faithless, God tells us he remains faithful. His love and his forgiveness is there for us all the time. It is that Light that shines in the darkness of our hearts.

It's not just the world out there that didn't recognize him. There are times when you and I in our lives don't recognize him. There are times when you and I find other things more important, more interesting, more worthy of our time than the One who lived and died in our place.

What could be more important than the One who has said, "Here, the doors to my home of heaven are open to you. I have taken away your sin. You are my own. I love you in spite of what you are." Nothing we know, but as we go about our lives, at times we don't recognize that truth. At times we turn off the Light and seem to want to live in the darkness.

That's why God sends people like John the Baptist. That's why he sends fellow believers that we have around us to be the witness to that Light and point us back to Christ and lead us back to his grace and lead us back to his truth and say, "God loves you. God wants you to be with him. And we love you. And we want you to be with us."

I need that reminder at times, and I am certain you also need the witness to the Light at times to come to you. So when that witness does, don't get your back up, don't get defensive, but thank God that he sent you someone who loves you that much that they want you to live in the Christmas Light that is Jesus Christ.

You and I can be his witnesses. You and I can reflect his Light. So eventually, whatever lights you put up on your tree and your house and your windows, you'll take them down and you'll put them away in a box and maybe forget about them and not be able to find them next year at that time, but make sure that you live every day in the Light of Jesus because his love and his forgiveness is there for you at all times.