



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

December 25, 2009

The Festival of the Nativity of our Lord

John 1:1-18

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Exodus 33:18-23, 34:5-7

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 98

Second Lesson: Hebrews 1:1-9

Gospel: John 1:1-18

### **The Word Became Flesh**

To prepare ourselves to celebrate this day, this moment of this year, we've gathered together in midweek services to focus on some of the names that were given to the Messiah based on a hymn, "My Soul in Stillness Waits," using some of the O Antiphons. Last Sunday at the Choir and Band Concert, we had a service that focused on these titles, these names given to the Messiah before he came into the world. Last night as we gathered late in the evening, we did the same thing looking at Christ the Lord. Today we look at the name that was given by God through the apostle John to Jesus after he had entered into the world. It's a name that we might look at and wonder what in the world it means, the "Word." The Word became flesh. Why does he call Jesus the "Word?" I think as we understand who Jesus is and what he has done, that gives us an understanding of this phrase and it gives us a great appreciation for what God is having the Holy Spirit say to us here. It tells us an incredible amount about who our God is and who he remains in spite of who we are.

We use the word differently. We use the word as a word, a group of letters that conveys a depiction of a verb, a noun, any of these kinds of things. We also use it, as maybe you've heard someone say, "What's the word?" What's the message? What's going on? Throughout Scripture God points us over and over to the importance of being in his Word. As we look at these words from John, he really tells us that Jesus is the Word himself. He is the message that all of God's Word has centered upon. In the beginning was the Word was this message that all of eternity would center upon. The Word was with God. The Word was God. From before there was time, the Word existed. This message existed. This message is God, who he is and what he has done. From eternity he created the world and he created a perfect world. His message was absolutely perfect.

But then, he who has this light and this life had to look down on what he created and watch human beings mess it up, take that light and pull down the shades so that light can't get in, kick that light out of their hearts as they turned away from what God had said and turned to their own thoughts. Led away by Satan, they brought darkness into a world that had no darkness, nothing evil; nothing wrong until Satan rebelled. Then he led Adam and Eve to rebel.

The message, what is the message? God from all eternity wanted perfection for his people, and his people turned their back on it. So what's the message? What did God

do? He sent a man. He sent all kinds of men, all kinds of prophets that proclaimed the message of light in the midst of darkness like we heard the children talk about last night or yesterday morning. But he has John focus on the last of those prophets. He sent John the Baptist whose sole purpose was to shine some light into the darkness. He was the emergency flashlight you have in your car, the kind without batteries that you just crank up so it's always ready and it's always there. This is John. He comes into this darkness and tries to shine a light, a laser-like focus that says "the One who is light and life is coming. Turn away from all your darkness. Turn away from it all and focus on this light."

He really tells us to do what we aren't supposed to do, right? Stare at the brilliance of the sun? When we stare at Jesus, that's what we get – something brighter and more brilliant, more powerful than the sun itself, which the Word created.

Some people because of this message that focused on the light in darkness, they were taken by it. They were moved by it. The Spirit touched them and in their mistaken darkness which still surrounded them thought "Maybe this is it. Maybe he's the light." He had to say, "No, I'm not even worthy to untie the sandals of this guy that is coming. He who comes after me was before me," we hear from the apostle John here.

Here's the message. Here's the Word. Mankind turns his back on God. God doesn't turn his back on mankind. He sends people to prepare the way. He sets everything into motion so that from eternity, this plan that he knew would happen, this message that he would have to send, he knew what it would entail. He sent people to lay one stone after another in the road that would prepare the way for the Messiah to come. Then it says light entered into darkness. Light entered into the world. Even though he had made the world, people shrugged, yawned, looked in another direction, looked to their own works, looked to their own efforts, and wanted to stay in the darkness instead of living in that light.

You and I shake our heads at that. How could his own not receive him? How could they not see that he was the light? How could that laser-like brightness not break through their stone hearts? But here is the thing. I'm going to assume that every one of us here this morning believe that Jesus is our Savior. I'm going to make the assumption that you're here because you believe that Jesus lived and died to take away your sins. And if you don't, my heart goes out to you. If you're here just because someone dragged you here and you don't believe that, my heart goes out to you because you are going to be in for a rude awakening. There is only one light that gives life. That is Jesus Christ, his life and his death in your place.

I'm working under the assumption that we all believe this. Yet, we are just like those people that were his own that did not receive him. Think of how often you and I, who know the light, who have it burning in our hearts, the Spirit, through the Word and the Sacraments, still want to wrap ourselves in that snugly of darkness. We want to get nice and comfortable by going back to what we're familiar with, what we're comfortable with.

Here's what I mean. Think about this. We put up that sign this time of the year, "Jesus is the Reason for the Season," right? You have that some place in your house, on a coffee cup you drink out of in the morning, anything like that, got that around somewhere? Think of how often we make other things the reason for the season. How often we embrace really focusing upon other things. Even the blessings that God gives us, sometimes we focus on them and buy into the world's celebration of what this season is about as opposed to Jesus.

I remember when I was in Minnesota. We struggled to get a choir going. We weren't blessed like we are here. We wanted to have the choir sing on one of the main festivals of the church year, Christmas. We were told by the choir members that Christmas is for families. It's not for singing in church.

If you know me, you know I'm not a real patient man. I wanted to throw hymnals at everyone right then and there. But that isn't right either. Look at God. He knows how you and I are going to wrap ourselves back in the darkness. He knows how we are going to be more excited to worship our children telling us about Jesus than we are to worship Jesus himself at times. We fall back into that. I don't see a row of videotapes up there this morning to videotape our celebration of his birth. That's fine to videotape our children, but sometimes do we get back into the darkness of focusing on the things of this world instead of the only light that opens heaven for us? If we are honest, we have to say we do, don't we?

We could make excuses and say we don't do this or don't do that, but we have to admit it to ourselves. We who live in the light sometimes want to wrap up in the darkness. Here's the thing – God knew that before he sent Jesus, before he had John write these words, he knew that he, the light, would come into the world and even though he made the world, the world would yawn and look the other way. He knew that his own people that he had that special relationship with from the time of Abraham on would not receive him. Yet he still entered this world. He still came to fulfill the law in our place. He still came to bring us grace and truth.

He brought us grace. He didn't come into this world and live and die for us because we've done something for him or we deserved or earned it. It's undeserved love, unconditional love. He loved us when we didn't love him. He continues to love us even though at times we want to go back into that darkness. From the fullness of his grace, we've received one blessing after another. He has made us born, not of human decision or of a father's will. It wasn't our decision. It wasn't the way things would normally happen. It was supernatural. He sent his Spirit into our hearts through Word and Sacrament to lead us to believe that this message that we're talking about, light into darkness, Jesus as our substitute, Jesus as the one who keeps the law in our place and then dies with our sins on his back, this is the message that saves. This is the Word. The Word, the message of how God would save us, became flesh, and then saved us.

We might wish that we could have been in that rock like Moses was, and God's glory pass in front of us, but quit wishing and look around. God has come to us today in his Word. He'll come to us in his Sacrament, with his very body and blood, to say, "This is how desperately I love you. This is how much I want you to be in the light and be forgiven. This is how certain you can be that I'll never, ever turn my back on you." This is our God.