

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
January 3, 2021



Merry Christmas,

Joy to the World, the Lord has come!!

Let us be glad and rejoice for what God has done for us on this most Holy Night with the gift of God's beloved Son Jesus.

Annual Congregational Meeting – the annual congregational meeting that is usually held in January each year will be postponed until January 2022. At that time, we will have a report of both 2020 and 2021 presented to the congregation.

The pre-school is looking for a Teacher's Aide for the Monday, Wednesday, Friday class beginning in February 2021. If you are interested or know someone who is interested, please contact Becky Watson at 610-858-1352. The pay is \$10 an hour for a 7 hour workday.

Communion in the coming weeks:

Christmas Season – January 3rd

Baptism of our Lord – January 10th

Third Sunday of the month – January 17th

May the joy, the peace and the love of Christmas warm your heart and enlighten your days.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Denise Home Phone 610-750-6432
Cell/Text Phone 610-858-8187

John 1:1-18

The Word Became Flesh

A reading from the 1st chapter of John beginning at the first verse.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4** in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. **7** He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. **8** He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. **9** The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know

him. **11** He came to what was his own,^[a] and his own people did not accept him. **12** But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, **13** who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

15 (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") **16** From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,^[c] who is close to the

Father's heart,^[d] who has made him
known.

Thanks be to God.

The Word of the Lord

Sermon

Preached by Reverend Grant Wickert

In recent years, good news-bad news jokes have gained quite a bit in popularity. Just the other day, I heard a new one. A husband comes home and says to his wife, "I have good news and bad news." "Give me the good news first," she says. "The air bag in our car works," he answers.

Christmas is one of those good news-bad news times, believe it or not. In the gospel accounts, it is irrepressible good news. In Luke, even earth cannot contain it, as a multitude of angels break forth into song at the birth of Christ. That's how we usually think of Christmas.

But there's another sense in which Christmas might be bad news for some. That's because, in God's way of relating to us, there is judgment as well as grace. Today's gospel lesson from John tells us clearly that

we are not automatically drawn to Jesus. "Jesus came to his own home, and his own people received him not." And later, in John 3, he writes, "This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light." (3:19)

Who are some of those people for whom the gospel was not good news? Take Herod, for one. What was unbelievable good news for the shepherds on the Galilean hillsides and the wise men journeying to worship the new born king was the worst possible news for this insecure, jealous ruler in Jerusalem. What a life full of contradictions he led! He had everything, yet he had nothing. He was a king, but in reality he was a nobody. He had a throne, but he was a puppet of Rome. He had the security the world could give, but he had none of the security that

the world cannot take away. So threatened was he by the news of another king being born that he ordered all the male children up to two years of age to be slain. That first Christmas was anything but good news for Herod.

How about the Herod in us? Jesus threatens the position of those who are high and haughty and filled with the sense of their own importance. As someone once said, “a person all wrapped up in himself makes a pretty small package.” How many of us are inclined to play God rather than confess our own humanity? How many of us are inclined to draw upon the things of this world for our sense of security and well-being, while we forget that God calls us to an eternal destiny and that’s where life is really headed?

The news of Christmas is also not necessarily good news for anyone filled with self-pride, for those who approach nearly

every situation in life with the motive of saving face. Some people will nurse a hurt rather than face reality about themselves. Some people will make decisions on the basis of wounded pride rather than on the will of God. Some people believe that choosing God’s will for life is frequently an agonizing experience. It certainly was for Jesus. What we commonly call his temptation experience was actually his wrestling with the Father’s will for his life. And that struggle did not end when he emerged from the wilderness to begin his public ministry. Even the last night of his life on this earth Luke pictures Jesus sweating, as it were, drops of blood and praying, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me...Nonetheless, not my will but thy will be done."

When we face decisions, is it God’s will we are thinking about or our own desires? Is Jesus trying to come into our lives and finding us not receiving

him any more than did the people of his hometown in his own day? Are we making the Word made flesh real in and through our lives in thought, word and deed, and through our decisions, in the lives of others?

Was Christmas bad news for anyone else? Yes, indeed. How about those Pharisees? They were the Jewish religious leaders who held to the strict observances of the rites and ceremonies of the law and the traditions of the elders. But in doing so they were not worshipping the LIVING God. They had made an idol of the law and of ceremonies. They were not open to any new word, any new revelation, from God.

Just as Herod's spirit is still alive in us, so is the spirit of the Pharisees. So many of us have our minds made up that God is not going to do anything new, not going to act in any new ways, that God is dull and boring and predictable. Where that pathway leads in short order is a

dead relationship with our God who lives and gives us life.

Jesus is the Word made flesh. God's entire purpose for humanity and his entire creation was wrapped up into that one life. The Pharisees could not stand to be exposed to the light of Jesus' life and teachings. They were hiding behind the law and tradition as some people today hide behind their own preconceived ideas and prejudices and dare God to change them.

For that sleepy little town of Nazareth the gospel was not good news but bad news. Do you remember how Jesus was greeted in his hometown when he returned there after beginning his public ministry? There were not banners flying. No parade of welcome. In Nazareth, the scripture says, Jesus could do no mighty work because of the people's lack of faith. In that town's rejection, we learn a valuable lesson. They did not want a down-to-earth God. They wanted a God aloof, a

God only to be feared, a God who could serve as a convenient scapegoat for their problems.

Does that sound like anyone today? You bet! How often do we spiritualize God right out of this world because we cannot stand the thought of a flesh-and-blood God who actually comes to be one with us in our human situation? A down-to-earth is much too troublesome, so we relegate him to the heavens where he will not bother us. We keep him safely locked up and do not let him loose in the world. We confine him to Sunday morning and do not want him messing up our plans for the rest of the week. We want a long ago, far away God because a here and now, down-to-earth God is far too threatening.

As we read of people's rejection of Jesus even as an infant, we have but a preview of Calvary, a foretaste of what people do to a God who is too close to them.

So here is today's question for you: is Christmas good or bad news for you? This Jesus comes to you and me in the sacrament of Holy Communion today and calls for our decision about him. We cannot be neutral to the Word made flesh. When we receive him, especially when we physically receive his body and blood into our lives, we cannot be on the fence. Is our response to him faith or offense? Acceptance or rejection? If it is faith, if it is acceptance, then we need to get ready to put that faith to work uprooting from our lives all those ways in which his light is showing up the darkness within us which we know down deep is still there.

There is no better way to begin this new year than to receive Christ anew, for he is the light of the world, the Word made flesh. Resolutions do not have the power to change us, because they depend on our own will power. But Jesus DOES have the power to remake us from within, and he will do it.

Live in his light. Let him show
you the way throughout this new
year. For he is God's WORD,
sent for you.

Blessing

May
The love of God,
The light of Christ,
And the joy of the Holy Spirit
Abide with you on this day
and forever more.

AMEN