

Sermon for January 5, 2020 – 2nd Sunday after Christmas

John 1:14-18

Theme: Jesus is the only-begotten Son

- 1) *Full of grace.*
- 2) *Full of truth*

¹⁴The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵John testified about him. He cried out, “This was the one I spoke about when I said, ‘The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.’” ¹⁶For out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. The only-begotten Son, who is close to the Father’s side, has made him known.

It’s all too easy for us to take things for granted. We flip a switch expecting light and turn on a faucet expecting water – thinking little about the vast infrastructures that exist to make those simple things happen. Behind each faucet are kilometers of pipes and lots of pumps allowing us to pour a simple glass of water. Each light switch is connected to an immense web of wiring, substations, generators and turbines.

What is true regarding the light switch and faucet is also true regarding the baby whose birth we celebrate at Christmas: it’s all too easy for us to take Jesus for granted - it’s all too easy for us to turn to him when we need something and forget about him once our need has been satisfied. But Jesus is far more than a faucet – existing merely to dispense forgiveness when we feel we need it. No, Jesus is the endless wellspring of salvation, who floods our lives with his grace. He is the light of the world – whose warm, life-giving rays are felt more on this earth than those of the sun.

But do we recognize these truths about Jesus? Do we bask in who he is and the utter grace he offers us every moment of our lives? Sadly, I must confess that I don’t, and I am certain that the same is true for you too. And because we don’t, we miss out on all the wonderful comfort, strength and hope this knowledge offers us.

Therefore, with the apostle John as our guide, let us spend some time looking at the baby in the virgin Mary’s arms, under the theme: **Jesus is the only-begotten Son.** 1) Full of grace. 2) Full of truth.

Part One: Full of Grace.

Our sermon text is part of a much longer prologue penned by the apostle John – introducing his Gospel. In wonderfully written prose, John identifies Jesus as the Word – who both existed with God from the beginning and is, in fact, true God himself. Though unrecognized by the world and

rejected by his people, Jesus is the promised Messiah, giving all who believe in him the right to become children of God.

And so our sermon text begins with the mighty statement that summarizes the great reason we celebrate Christmas: ¹⁴*The Word became flesh and dwelled among us. We have seen his glory, the glory he has as the only-begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Jesus is the LORD in the flesh. To know Jesus is to know God. This is why he is called the Word. The LORD came to dwell among us. He is not a God far away – with little knowledge of what goes on. No, he came to pitch his tent with us as we pilgrim on to the promised land of heaven. He came to be our Immanuel – our God with us. He came to save us.

Jesus is the very glory of God. He is the Only-begotten from the Father. What does Only-begotten mean? Good question! It is a term inspired by the Holy Spirit that tries to describe the indescribable: the eternal relationship God the Son has with the Father. Jesus is God – one in being with the Father and Holy Spirit and coequal in all power, majesty, and honor. And yet, in some way that defies all explanation, Jesus is unique – a separate person, possessing a unique relationship with each member of the Trinity. He is the Only-begotten Son whom the Father loves infinitely more dearly than any parent could love a child, and who loves the Father infinitely more dearly than any child could love their parent.

And it is He – the greatly loved, Only-begotten Son of the Father who willingly came into this World to fulfill his Father’s wish to save us. That is the Son’s greatest glory: to care for us undeserving sinners to such a degree that he became one of us in order to suffer the punishment we deserved and die in payment for our sins. Wow! Jesus is the highest expression of God’s love. He is God’s grace and truth personified.

But how do we know that the baby the Virgin cradled in her arms actually is our Immanuel? He certainly doesn’t seem to be anything more than a simple, human baby. You know how the expression goes: if it looks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it must be a duck, right? Ah, but looks can be deceiving! Take an electrical outlet, for example. To the little child, it looks absolutely harmless – a plaything that wouldn’t hurt anyone. But every parent knows that there is more to an electrical outlet than meets the eye. Parents need to instruct their children to look beyond what they can perceive with their senses. So too, the LORD sent His representatives to instruct us: there is more to Jesus than meets the eyes.

It should be quite enough for the apostle John to say: “I know, I experienced Jesus’ teachings and miracles first hand. He is God in the flesh.” But the apostle John doesn’t just rely on his own perceptions. No, he points to the witness of another: John the Baptist – the great forerunner of the Messiah, whose appearance itself was prophesied about in Scripture.

¹⁵*John testified about him. He cried out, “This was the one I spoke about when I said, ‘The one coming after me outranks me because he existed before me.’”* If Jesus were a mere man, the Baptist’s words would make no sense. But Jesus is more than a man. He is the Only-begotten Son of God, who has existed with the Father from all eternity! In Him dwells all the fullness of God’s being bodily.¹

¹⁶For out of his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.

Do you know what grace is? It's God's, undeserved love. Jesus is the revelation, source and stream of God's love. Through Jesus, God created the universe. Because of Jesus, humanity was not immediately condemned to hell when Adam and Eve sinned. Because of Jesus, God continues to send sunshine and rain on both the wicked and righteous alike. It's because of God's great love for us in Jesus that sinful mankind is not consumed. Jesus is our righteousness. Jesus is our forgiveness. Jesus is the reason we repent of our sins. He is the source of our faith. Jesus is our reason for living. He is our comfort in death. Because of Jesus, we know that all things – even the evil we experience — will work out for our good. Because of Jesus, we are confident that we will live forever with God in paradise.

Because of Jesus, we don't have to live in regret because of our past. In Jesus, we don't have to fear the future. In Jesus, we can live in abundant peace at the present because He is our Creator. He is our Saviour. He is our brother. He is our God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: do you now understand how sad it is, when we take Jesus for granted? Every day, trials and temptations pop up in our lives – things that fill us with anxiety, regret, worry or despair. We look to ourselves to be strong – taking pride in ourselves when we overcome and sinking into despair when we fail. We are constantly trying to make life better for ourselves, viewing Jesus as nothing more than a shower: a means to get clean if we get ourselves too dirty. Oh, how sad it is that we forget who Jesus is. How unnecessarily we burden ourselves with worry and stress. Jesus is the Only-begotten Son. He is the proof of God's reconciliation. He is the reason for our living. He is our confidence in dying. Because of Jesus, we don't have to prove ourselves strong. Rather, at his invitation, we empty ourselves – confessing our utter unworthiness and absolute need for his grace. And when we thus come before him – with nothing but empty hands looking to receive the grace he offers, he fills them with everything we need for our body, soul and life. True, he might not give us what we want. Why? Because what we want might not always be what's best for us. But one thing we can be sure of is this: Jesus always gives us what we need. He gives us what is best for our souls, that we might ever grow in our relationship with him – letting go of the world and trusting in him alone for forgiveness, life and salvation.

Part Two: Full of Truth

¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Biblical Christianity isn't like any other religion on this earth. Every other religion in the world is basically a system of laws, by which a person tries to appease God and earn his love. Biblical Christianity is not that at all. The law that God gave through Moses – with all its ceremonies and regulations – was never meant to be a means through which people could earn salvation. No, its primary purpose was to show us our need for a Savior. Its ceremonial aspect was meant to point people ahead to the salvation the Savior would bring. The law given through Moses was merely a foreshadowing of what was to come. The reality is found in Jesus. He fulfilled the perfect love

the law demands. In our place, he offered the perfect sacrifice for sin – foreshadowed in the law given through Moses. No, Jesus is no mere lawgiver. He is God’s grace and truth personified.

You see, there are many people on this earth who claim to know God. Mohammed, Joseph Smith, and many others claimed to have received visions from Him. Many false teaching Christians claim to have special insight into what God *really* wants from humanity. But here is the truth about all their claims:

¹⁸*No one has ever seen God.*

True, we are told that Moses was allowed a glimpse of God’s glory after he walked past, but even he was not allowed to see God’s full glory face to face. So let me ask you: how can anyone – like Joseph Smith or Mohammed - who has never seen the full glory of God, make God known to us? The answer is: they can’t. But there is one who can:

The only-begotten Son, who is close to the Father’s side, has made him known.

Consider the beauty of this verse: Jesus is not merely someone who knows about God nor is he a prophet who saw God from a distance. No, He is someone who is intimate with God. The expression “close to the Father’s side” could be more literally translated “is in the bosom of the Father”. The picture is that of a dearly loved Son hugging his dearly loved father. He knows his Father’s heart because He is the object of all his Father’s affection. For this reason, Jesus is the one and only person who can reveal the truth to us. Only he can reveal God to us. And what truth about God does he reveal? That the LORD is gracious – so much so that he sent his Only-begotten Son into the world in order that, whoever believes in him, shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Take Jesus for granted? Sad to say, it’s something we do every day. May the LORD forgive us for this. More than that, may the Holy Spirit ever direct our attention to Jesus. May our hearts ever be stirred to meditate on His Word and partake of His Sacraments. These are the means God uses to connect us to Jesus. These are the means by which His abundant, saving grace overflows into our lives. Then we will know the truth about God – and this overflowing, gracious truth will set us free. Amen.

¹Colossians 2:9 EHV