

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas everywhere you go... We'll maybe next week when the temperature dips again and maybe we'll have that white Christmas after all. But over the past few weeks I've said a time or two over the past few weeks, "It just doesn't feel like Christmas." I don't know why. Maybe it's because it snuck up on me this year and I don't like that and I feel like the Apostle John understands me.

Our Gospel doesn't feel like Christmas. John misses the manger, the shepherds, even the Virgin Mary and Joseph. There are no angels proclaiming, "*A Savior has been born to you.*" No pregnant mothers waddling to Bethlehem. It just doesn't seem like Christmas. But this is the same story, however it's told from a very, very different point of view.

Can you imagine gathering around the Christmas tree and telling your children the Christmas story with, "*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him and without him was not anything made that has been made... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*"? Talk about deep. John tells the Christmas story not through the eyes of the Shepherds, Mary, Joseph, or even the Angels. He tells the story of Christmas as seen through the eyes of God.

As you can imagine, this makes John's Christmas story hard to relate to because we're not God and John speaks of the divine. There are no cattle lowing, poor babies waking, season of giving, but a new beginning. John alludes to Genesis 1:1 but here something new is being made. Something new is starting in the days of Caesar and Quirinius and it's not the same thing as God created "*in the beginning.*" In fact it's not even a thing, "thing" doesn't appear in the Greek. John simply says, "*all.*"

In the beginning lots of things were made. In the beginning there was no sin, nothing at all. But now, God is coming into the world and he's back to creating just not things. Light was coming into a very dark world. A world that would fight against the light and seek to destroy it, but the darkness could not overcome it. Life and light came at Christmas.

Sure we can keep the manger scenes and journey to Bethlehem but this; this puts everything that happened there into perspective, which makes the real Christmas story unbelievable. The Roman world could have cared less about Christ's coming into the world. If confronted with who was coming, they wouldn't believe that God would stoop so low as to enter into humanity. God coming down and taking on flesh was laughable. Why would he do that? The flesh was bad or so they thought and they looked forward to leaving the physical behind.

Many have attempted to deal with this issue. They think they are protecting God and in attempting to protect him from all that is unclean – they change Christianity. They attack the deity of Jesus. He's just a man. That teaching is nothing new. The early Christian Church struggled against such heresies. Arius was punched by the real Saint Nicholas at the council of Nicea for suggesting that Jesus was anything less than God. And he's not the only one who doesn't like Christmas. But why?

Why don't people like the idea of God coming in flesh? Why is it that the *darkness is trying to overcome or conquer the light that has come into this world*? If Jesus has to come down to earth, it means we need saving. It means we are unable and incapable of saving ourselves. It means that we are not good enough on our own. And then another savior is sought out, another plan is preferred, and it is not Christian even if it bears some similarities. Instead our works are emphasized. Secret knowledge is boasted of. Self-improvement and good works are emphasized. Anything but the Word made flesh for us on Christmas.

Sometimes even mega-churches will change Jesus from “savior” into “life coach, mentor, cheer leader, example to follow,” rather than savior. A different Jesus is offered, holding out a different gospel, offering a different Christmas. The worst part is that we may even buy in to it. We’ll pretty up the manger make it look like something more regal. We might even pretend that we wouldn’t have treated Jesus that way if we were there. As if Jesus had to come down into this world in the flesh to take care of the problems and sins of other people and not my own. It was for us and for our salvation that he came down from heaven.

But if God came down like he did at Sinai in fire, thunder, and lightning we’d be terrified. The Israelites were afraid to approach him or even hear him speak to them. They pleaded with Moses, “*Have God speak to you directly but don’t have him speak to us for we will die.*” (Exodus 20:19) Hebrews says, “*He is a consuming fire.*” (Hebrews 12:29). *No one may see me and live.* (Exodus 33:20). He is our creator God who greater, stronger, more majestic than we can imagine. This is the God we defy. And if we fully understood what Israel saw and heard we would better understand the fear of the LORD.

But that’s not how God wrapped our gifts on that first Christmas. He had to protect us from himself. He had to hide his glory. He wrapped himself in humanity. He clothed his glory in order to be with us and bless us. Here he clothed himself with humanity. There were no warm and fuzzy feelings about that first Christmas. The baby born of Mary is not a child that there is something divine about, but the baby is God. Mary is not just the mother of Jesus but Mary is the mother of God. The One who created history entered into the story when the time had fully come. The infinite really is contained in the finite.

That points ahead to the second gift. He didn’t enter the world in comfort. He didn’t come among Kings in palaces. He was born in a feeding trough and approachable to shepherds. No one welcomed him. No one recognized him as *the true light coming into the world. His own did not receive him.* And he was about to go lower than that. Instead of welcoming him as the King and Creator of the world, he was rejected, ruled insignificant, and crucified. Jesus stands before Pilate who proclaims “Behold the man,” nothing more in his eyes. His flesh was scourged, beaten, spit upon. This one is God.

He is the Lord the giver of life. He is the one who laid down his life and takes it up again and he brings another gift through Word and Sacrament. Word became flesh and came down to us so that we might comprehend him. We are unable to grasp him by our own strength. We confess, “*I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in my Lord Jesus or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctifies and keeps me in the Christian faith.*” But God came to us. He came down to us so that we might know him.

Jesus is the God-man. God and man joined together in the single person: Jesus. This is the gift of Jesus. He comes not in wrath and fury but as an infant. Who is afraid of a baby? Some of you might be. But you can come close to them and even look at them at a distance without fear. Here in Jesus everyone is able to approach God even if you can’t comprehend God and trust me, “you won’t be able to.” Here in Jesus everyone is able to find the comfort that he wants to give us. Here in Jesus is the God who comforts and saves.

So yes, “It is Christmas,” even when it doesn’t feel like it. Every Sunday as we sing the Gloria to God in the Highest we are taken back to Christmas and join our voices to the angels praising God. And every

Sunday Christ comes with his gifts and this weekend John so happens to trot out his gift as well. His gifts may not feel like they fit the Christmas bill but they certainly amplify what is going on in the manger.

This child is God. Merry Christmas. Amen.