

Christmas Day
December 25, 2019
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
True Grace for Christmas

John 1:14 (NIV84)

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Dear Friends in Jesus, born to be our Savior,

When is a gift not really a gift?

The company trying to sell time shares will give you a free weekend away or a new television but only if you sit through their sales presentation. It is not a gift if you have to do something to get it. The cell phone provider will give you a gift, a free phone or some phone accessory. But you don't get the gift unless you switch to a certain plan. It is not really a gift if you have to purchase something to get it. The tire shop will give you a free tire but only if you buy three other tires first. You can't tell them, "I don't want the three that cost money. I just want the free one." It is not a gift if you have to pay money to get it. It is only a discount.

What about gifts for Christmas? The secular idea of Christmas tells children that they "better be good for goodness sake" and stay on the nice list if they want to get the good gifts. It is not a true gift if there are conditions of behavior attached to the gift. Sometimes we might receive a gift that does not require us to pay in advance and there are no spoken or written conditions attached. However, there is a feeling that we owe them. Some givers will even use this feeling of obligation to buy us. They give gifts and then we will more likely say "yes" to whatever favor they ask of us in the future. It is not a true gift if it obligates us to pay it back in the future.

True gifts are rare in this world of sin. But God the Father knows how to give true gifts. John tells us that the gift of Jesus at Christmas is a gift full of grace and truth.

We first look at the truth of Christmas according to John's Gospel. This truth will make God's grace all the more amazing. In this one verse, John tells us the wonderful truths of the gospel. He calls the Son of God, the Word. The Son of God is One who reveals God's Word to us. He is the messenger above every angel and better than all the prophets. He is the Word who spoke all things into existence at creation. The Word is the eternal, all powerful, all knowing second person of the Trinity. John wants us to know all of this when he calls Jesus, the Word. All of this is enough truth to write volumes of books as has been done throughout the centuries. The Trinity, creation and prophecy are enough truth to overwhelm the human mind's ability to comprehend it all. And this Word came to us at Christmas.

"The Word became flesh." This truth has filled more volumes as people try to comprehend how the Creator can take on the flesh of his creation. The Child born to Mary has to be swaddled like any other newborn to keep him warm. Jesus needs his mother to feed him or he will starve. He is a helpless infant who can do almost nothing to care for himself. How can a helpless baby be the Mighty God? How can a child lying in a manger be the Son of God, the Word by whom all things were made? This truth of the

incarnation, that is, the Son of God taking on human flesh, is a mystery beyond our full understanding. But John doesn't fill volumes, he just writes, "The Word became flesh."

And then he adds to this truth. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Why would the holy Son of God live among us? He is full of grace and truth. We humans are full of sin and deception. He dwelt in a perfect heaven. We humans dwell on a sin cursed earth. What is your idea of a perfect place to live? Maybe the mountains or something on the beach? Maybe it is a home in the country where you can see for miles or a busy city with activity all the time. If you were living in your dream home in your favorite place in this world, would you give it up to live in a refugee camp? Would you give it all up to go live in a place where all you might have is a tarp to make a tent for your family surrounded by tens of thousands of sick, malnourished, hopeless people? John tells us the truth that the eternal Son of God "made his dwelling among us."

He wandered throughout Judea without a place to lay his head. He lived among people who were selfish, violent, hated filled and ignorant. He lived among people who were dead in sin. Many people had no hope of forgiveness from God. Others were so far lost that they didn't think they needed God's forgiveness. He lived among people like us, sinners who have no hope of salvation on our own.

These are the amazing truths John communicates to us with his short phrase, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." The next question is "Why?"

Why did God plan out Christmas, the birth of Christ, for thousands of years? Grace.

Grace is often defined as undeserved love and in our context it is God's undeserved love. Grace is the motivation behind a true gift. Grace has no preconditions. The incarnation of Christ is true no matter what we do or do not do, no matter what we believe or do not believe. God gave his one and only Son to be born to save us out of pure grace. He did not make us show that we deserved this gift. We did not have to make an effort to be good first. We did not have to stay on the nice list. Think about it. If there were any preconditions for receiving the gift of Christ, not one of us would be able to meet them. The gift is all by God's grace.

And this gift is not a discount program like a BOGO sale. The Word became flesh and lived among us so that Christ could give his holy and precious blood on the cross to pay for the sin of the world. He did not make a partial payment but has paid in full. He did not make a down payment but paid our debt completely. Forgiveness through Christ is a true gift, by grace alone.

In addition, this true gift does not come with any conditions after the gift. Christ did not give his life for us to get something from us. We don't have to pay him back over our lifetime. Salvation through Christ is a true gift, a gift of grace.

Who can give a gift like this? Only the One who is full of grace. The Christ Child is full of grace and everything he will do is done willingly and freely for the benefit of others. Jesus battles Satan's temptations in our place. Jesus suffers and dies in our place. Jesus rises from the dead to give us eternal life. He has done this for all people, whether someone knows it or not, whether they believe it or not. Jesus is full of grace.

Some say that Mary is full of grace. But this is a different phrase in the original language. Jesus is full of grace. It is more accurate to say that Mary is fully graced. She was the recipient of God's grace and favor. On this Christmas Day, we remember that we are like Mary in this way. We too are fully graced for we have received the true gift of the Word made flesh. We are recipients of the true grace of God in Christ.

Amen.