**John 1:1-18 Christmas 2C 2/1/22**

Videolink: <https://youtu.be/6JrotSKu4zM>

In the past two years, we have been reminded how important physical presence is. Many have had to put up with not being able to see the people they love in person because of travel restrictions. Some people have not been able to spend time with loved ones who were ill or dying. On New Year’s Eve, many of us were not able to spend time with all of our families and friends because we were restricted to a maximum of ten people in our homes.

Thankfully we have modern means to communicate, texting, social media, voice, and video calls, but nothing can match having the important people in your life in the same physical space. Talking face to face, sensing their physical presence. We need to experience the physical presence of other people in order to fully experience our humanity.

In the beginning, when God created Adam and Eve, God would walk and talk with them in the garden. That was how it was meant to be, until sin created a barrier between God and human beings and Adam and Eve began to avoid God’s physical presence, even hiding from God in the garden. If only things could return to the way they were meant to be, and God would come down from heaven and be present with us.

When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, they too longed for God to be physically present with them. God knew their need for his constant presence, and he planned to live with them, in the middle of their camp. God gave Moses detailed instructions to build a Tabernacle a tent surrounded by an enclosure, and when it was completed, God descended from heaven in a cloud and filled the tabernacle with his presence.

Wherever the people went the Tabernacle would be set up in the very centre of the camp and God would live there. Twenty-four hours a day the people could see the presence of God, in a cloud over the tent in the day and a pillar of fire during the night. Every day the people knew without a doubt that God was with them. Later when the people lived in the promised land the Tabernacle was set up in various places, eventually, it was taken to Jerusalem by Kind David and God lived in the tabernacle in that city. God continued to live in the tabernacle until Solomon replaced the Tabernacle with the temple in Jerusalem which then became God’s residence on earth.

God being present in the tabernacle and later in the temple was a gracious gift to God’s people. But God was still not fully present to everyone. Only the high priest was able to enter the most holy place where God was present and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement. There was still a barrier between God and human beings and that barrier meant God’s true nature was still partially hidden from humanity. We did not know the full truth about the depth of God’s love and mercy.

Without Jesus, we can get some idea of what God is like. We may look at the beauty of a sunset, experience the wonders of nature and get a glimpse of God’s majesty and might. Yet from nature we get mixed messages when nurturing rains turn to devastating floods, and when nature unleashes the destruction of other natural disasters or devastates our bodies with viruses and cancer. Without Jesus it is hard to tell if God is love and grace or God is judgement and fury.

John says that the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. The word used for dwelling means ‘pitched his tent’ his tabernacle. In the past God had resided among his people in a tent, then a temple and now finally God lives among us in a human body, the body of the Word made flesh.

No longer is God somewhere up in heaven. No longer do we have to go to a building halfway across the world. No longer do we need to look for a special tent, or building to find God. God is now living among us in the body of Jesus Christ.

When the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us, then we finally discovered what God is really like. God is like that little baby born in humility in Bethlehem. If you want to know what God is like then imagine a baby, resting in a mother’s arms. There in that baby you will find that God is not to be feared, God is not full of vengeance and fury. Rather God is gentle and kind and full of grace and truth. God is approachable like that little baby.

In that baby is wrapped the love and compassion of God. As we look at the baby Jesus we come to realise that we do not need to be afraid of God. God is not seeking to catch us out and punish us. Instead, God has come to forgive us, to make us one of his dearly beloved children. Through the Word made flesh, God calls those who believe in Jesus into his family. Jesus is the firstborn among the many that God wants to hold in his arms and surround with love and grace.

No one has ever seen God except the one and only son, who himself is God and is in the closest relationship with the Father. The Son became a human being to make God known to us. Through the Son, we see what the Father is really like. When the Son speaks the Father is speaking, when the Son does the Father is doing. The Son leaves us with no doubt in the depth of God’s love for us. In the Word-made-flesh, we see God will go to any length to reach us. God will stop at nothing to bring light into the darkness, to reveal the truth to us, to shower us with grace and give us life in all its fulness.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and

minds safe in Christ Jesus.

**Amen.**

Pastor Rolf Lungwitz

God has not left us in fear and confusion. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” In order that we might know beyond a doubt that God’s love and compassion for us will have the final word, the Word took on our flesh. The Word came to us in the form of a frail and vulnerable infant to dwell among us and to show us firsthand the depth of God’s love for us.

Martin Luther expresses this truth so well in his Christmas sermons. He says that reflection on the divinity and majesty of God may very well terrify and crush us. That is why Christ took on our humanity, that he should not terrify us but rather that with love and favor he should console us. For what could be less intimidating or more comforting than a baby? Luther writes:

See how God invites you in many ways. He places before you a babe with whom you may take refuge. You cannot fear him, for nothing is more appealing to a person than a babe. Are you afraid? Then come to him, lying in the lap of the fairest and sweetest maid. You will see how great is the divine goodness, which seeks above all else that you should not despair. Trust him! Trust him! Here is the Child in whom is salvation. To me there is no greater consolation given to humankind than this, that Christ became human, a child, a babe, playing in the lap of his most gracious mother. Who is there whom this sight would not comfort? Now is overcome the power of sin, death, hell, conscience, and guilt, if you come to see this gurgling Babe and believe that he is come, not to judge you, but to save.1

Of course, the baby in the manger is only the beginning of God’s message to us in the Word-made-flesh. But in this baby, we begin to see and understand the very heart of God. “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (John 1:18). In the Word-made-flesh, we see a heart so full of love for us that it will go to any length to reach us. It will stop at nothing to make us God’s own. Not even the frailty of human flesh nor the darkness of suffering and death can keep God from us, nor us from God.

For “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5).