

Title: "What Does Christmas Mean?"

Text: I John 1:1-4

(\*Adapted from a chapter in Tim Keller's book, Hidden Christmas)

I am sure you are aware that at Christmas we usually focus on the biblical texts in Luke and Matthew that tell the story of Jesus' birth.

-And we will certainly do that tonight on Christmas eve at the Candlelight service.

But this morning we are listening to the Apostle John.

-We read the first verse from his Gospel earlier in the service,

-and I'd like you to listen now to the first verses of John's First Letter way at the end of the New Testament.

John doesn't tell the story of Christmas, but what he does is give us an excellent explanation of what Christmas means.

A moment ago you heard him proclaim that in the birth of Christ, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Listen now to First John 1:1-4 as he proclaims again what this means for us.

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"The life appeared," John says.

"That which was from the beginning," he says.

The Word by whom and through whom and for whom all things were created,

-He who gave life to everything in the first place....

-He came from heaven to earth and took on human flesh and came to live among us.

"The life appeared," John says.

That is what Christmas is about.

-And in the spatial terms of this "Living Faith in 3D" we have been exploring all Fall,

-we would say that the "upward dimension" came down from "on high" to transform our 2 dimensional existence.

God didn't wait for us to get our human act together and return to Him.

-He didn't wait for us to overcome our own sin and save ourselves.

-He came to us.

-That is the story of Christmas.

Have you noticed the banner we have hanging in our sanctuary throughout Advent and Christmas?

-A manger at the center with the Greek Alpha and Omega signs covering it.

-The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.

-The A and the Z, the beginning and the end.

-But then the words above and below:

-The Word became flesh

-Emmanuel (which means: God with us.)

That is the heart of the Christmas message,

-and the Apostle John wants us to know:

THAT is what was happening in that manger.

-The Eternal God was taking on flesh and being born among us.

That is the "life" that appeared.

-It wasn't just a baby being born.

-That baby was Emmanuel, God with us.

2. And secondly John wants us to know that this is not "just a story."

This isn't a winter's night tale of Santa Claus coming on a sleigh with flying reindeer.

No, John says. We are witnesses of something that really happened.

-This life that appeared, we saw it with our own eyes, we heard him with our own ears, we touched his body with our own hands.

-And those verbs John uses here in verse 1, "saw him, touched him, heard him,"

-those are "eye witness testimony" words.

In John's day, just like in our day, when a witness was called to give testimony in a court of law,  
-the witness is supposed to tell in their own words what they saw, and heard, and touched or experienced.

John uses all three right in a row because he wants his hearers to know the truth of what he is giving testimony to.  
-He is saying, "Listen, I am not just making this up, and I am not alone in giving this testimony."  
-There are hundreds of us who heard and saw and touched this Jesus.  
-There are hundreds of us who experienced His life, and his death, and his resurrection.

We will all tell you the same thing: this Jesus was and is the Son of God who came into this world not to condemn the world, but to save the world from sin.

3. And thirdly, that's the "life" John is talking about here:  
Eternal life.

John calls Jesus the "Word of Life" here in verse 1.  
-It is "that life" which appeared he says in verse 2.

And what I want us to notice is that John doesn't say that Jesus simply "came to bring us eternal life."  
-No. He is proclaiming that Jesus actually IS eternal life.

It's not a product Jesus comes to earth to sell us.  
-Jesus IS eternal life.  
-And the way we receive that life is to unite ourselves to Him in faith.

4. And that is John's whole desire in writing His Gospel and this letter.

He says in verses 3-4 here, that he wants us to actually enter into fellowship with him and all those others who have fellowship with the Father and with the Son.  
He wants us to unite ourselves to Jesus, too, so that we might have this life.

Or in terms of our 3D Living Faith, John is inviting us to open the inward dimension of our human lives so that the upward dimension of God's eternal life can enter in to cleanse us and then fill us to the full measure of all the love of God.

And John is telling us this because the fullness of that love of God in Christ, that "eternal life" he has experienced, -it is now flowing out of him into the outward dimension of the world around him.

That is what Christmas is about.

- God coming to us means that we are invited to come to Him.
- We are invited to receive Him,
- We are given the opportunity to welcome Him in our world, and to welcome Him into OUR world.

Amazingly, because God comes to us, John says that we can now have fellowship with Him.

- We can have a deep, rich, multi-dimensional relationship with the Father and the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit.

My friends, this is what makes Christianity unique.

- Eastern religions do not even think having a personal relationship with God is possible.
- For them, God is an impersonal life force.
- And for other faiths, God may be a personal being, -but God is too holy, too far removed from the concerns of earth to have any intimate relationship with people.

But the meaning of Christmas is that God became flesh and dwelt among us.

- The life appeared, and we saw and touched and heard and experienced Eternal Life among us.

God went to great lengths to make Himself known because He wanted us to actually know him.

- He wanted us to experience personally how wide and long and high and deep His love for us is.

And the rest of the story is that in Christ He went to great lengths to die an atoning death for the sin that separated us

from Him.

All of this He did so that we might have fellowship with the Father and the Son and the Spirit.

-And with each other.

-And with our own souls.

And this, John says, brings joy to the world.

“We write this,” John says, “to make our joy complete.”

There is true joy in coming to know the meaning of Christmas for yourself.

-That is, there is true joy in coming to discover that God is with you.

And this is what John, and the whole Bible wants us to grasp.

-This is what this whole sermon series on “living faith in 3D” is all about: God with us.

You see, if God does not exist, or if God exists but is nowhere to be found on earth;

-if He exists in his own dimension of heaven, but the things of heaven never touch or connect with the things of earth,

-and Christmas never happened:

-then we are stuck in a 2 dimensional reality.

-There is us, and the world around us.

-We are on our own in this world to take care of ourselves.

-We are on our own to look out for ourselves.

-We are on our own to figure things out for ourselves.

But the Bible reveals there is something more. God with us.

-The God who created all things.

-The God who sustains all things.

-That God is actually engaged with us in this world.

He does not just exist off somewhere else in a separate dimension we call heaven.

-He exists and makes Himself known in our dimension we call earth.

-He is with us.

And I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but all through the Bible,  
-the only essential ingredient which all the biblical characters shared was that God was with them.

That's what changed their lives.  
-That's what impacted their decisions.  
-That's what enabled them to impact the world around them.

Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Ruth, Esther, David, all of the prophets:  
-they were just people like you and me, making their way through complicated lives,  
-trying to figure out what to do and where to go and how to deal with the people and world around them.

But the one ingredient that they shared in common that transformed their lives and the world around them,  
-was "God was with them."

His presence with them is what created in them a Living Faith in 3D.

-And at Christmas, in the birth of Christ, God came to be with us in an even more vivid and real way than any Old Testament saint had ever experienced.

God took on flesh and dwelt among us.

This is the good news John wants us to know and to experience today: the Life appeared.

-God with us.

-We experienced Him, John proclaims, and you can, too.

-By his death and resurrection, your sins can be washed away.

-That which separates us from Him can be removed.

-Our sins can be forgiven, cleansed, removed from us as far as the east is from the west.

And we can then have fellowship with the Father and with the

Son by the power and presence of His Holy Spirit.

God with us.

My friends, do you know that God is with you?

-Is that simple statement the essential ingredient in your life?

-Is it what you trust in every day?

-That He is with you and will never leave you nor forsake  
you?

It's the essential ingredient in any living faith.

-It's what Christmas is all about.

Let's pray.