

"The Uniqueness/Person of the Incarnation"

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Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Tonight through the familiar Christmas story in Luke's Gospel, John begins his Gospel with an angle a bit different from the other Gospel writers.

Over the last few weeks, we've been looking at John's unique perspective on Christmas, on the incarnation, God becoming man. And I want us to see one more thing in it tonight.

Let's read the whole passage, but focus primarily on the verses at the end. This is John chapter 1 at verse 1. God's perfect Word given to us that we might know Him and love Him.

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 was made.

[1 : 04] In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

He came as a witness to bear witness about the light that all might believe through Him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him.

But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness about Him and cried out, This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.

[2 : 13] And from His fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, the only God, who is at the Father's side.

He has made Him known. Amen. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word. Amen. If you've been in a church long enough, you've probably heard someone say, Be careful, you might be the only Jesus they'll ever see.

And often that's intended as a reminder that we are to reflect Jesus to those who don't know Him, which is okay as far as that goes.

But it's always bothered me a bit, because if I'm the only Jesus that you ever know, you're in big trouble. There's a big difference between Him and me.

Please don't say amen as loudly as they did the first time. And one of the reasons it's important for all of us to know that and realize that is it's not our job ultimately to be Jesus.

[3 : 27] He is unique. In fact, you'll notice that when this other guy named John, it's John the Baptist, is talked about here, it's clearly pointed out that He is not the light.

A few verses later, beyond what we read, the first words we hear John the Baptist say are, I am not the Christ. In other words, I can't be the only prophet, the only teacher, the only Savior that you know.

There's another one that I'm here to tell you about and point you to. Now we have seen in the past few weeks how God's Word calls those of us who are not the light to testify to the true light, as John did.

To bring the light of Jesus into the darkness of our hearts and the darkness of our world. We've seen how we are to sacrifice our own comforts for the sake of others in order to run toward their

pain and sacrifice for them to enter into their suffering as Jesus did for us.

We've seen we're to share God's heart of love toward everyone around us. But we don't do those things perfectly, do we? And so we often give an incomplete and broken picture of what God is really like.

[4 : 50] So if you're here tonight and your biggest problem with Jesus is an image that you have of Him from those who claim to follow Him, let me encourage you never to stop there.

You will never get the truly glorious picture of who God is just from us. You actually need to see Jesus Himself.

See, that's what this passage is telling us. That Jesus uniquely, perfectly, and gloriously reveals who God is and what God is like.

The incarnation, His coming into this world is the intentional entrance of the divine Son of God into our fallen world in human flesh. To secure our redemption at the cost of His life because of His great love.

It's the unique, unrepeatable event in which Jesus comes to reveal what God is really like. The Word becomes flesh so we can know God and experience Him personally in our lives.

[6 : 04] Kids, are any of y'all excited about opening presents tomorrow? Anybody in here excited? Yes, yeah, yeah. And some big kids, y'all too?

Yes, that's exciting. Have you ever had a present before that you'd heard about and you thought you really wanted it, but you didn't really know exactly what it was going to be like until you opened it and had it for yourself?

When I was four years old, I really wanted a dog. I had heard about dogs. I had seen dogs from behind fences and behind glass and that sort of thing.

And it seemed like a great thing, but I'd never had a dog before. And that's actually very different.

And sure enough, Christmas morning, I came downstairs and there was this package under the tree that kept moving.

And I raced over to it as soon as I noticed and tore it open. And sure enough, there it was, my very own real live puppy just for me. And I got to hold it and touch it and play with it and train it and clean up after it.

[7 : 14] And all those other things that happen when you actually have a dog. See, I'd heard about dogs, but I actually needed to experience it for myself to know really what it was like to have a dog.

Maybe you'll have that experience tomorrow when you unwrap a toy or a game or a trip somewhere you've heard about before, but never been yourself. And you'll get to go experience it firsthand.

I hope it's even better than you're imagining it's going to be. But see, that's what happened the first Christmas. God unwrapped himself.

The word became flesh so that we could know what God is really like, could see him and touch him and experience him for ourselves.

And that's a huge deal because, as John reminds us, no one has ever seen God. All through the Old Testament, that was an impossibility.

[8 : 19] No one could behold the glory of God and live to tell about it. I mean, people had heard lots of things about God. They'd heard what he was like.

They'd seen some things that he had done. But no one had seen God. Until, verse 18, the only God, the Son who is at the Father's side, made him known.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we saw his glory. In that manger in Bethlehem about 2,000 years ago, God unwrapped himself because he wants us to know him.

This passage is telling us that God is demonstrated most clearly and most fully in the Word become flesh.

Jesus is the perfect image of God. The exact representation of his being. He's the radiance of the glory of God.

[9 : 25] So we're not missing out on anything. We're not getting the backup version. We're not stuck with a scratch or dent model. Jesus shows us God in human flesh.

We make lots of assumptions about God and what he's like, don't we? We experience things in life and conclude this is what must be true about God.

This is what he's like. For instance, many conclude that God doesn't exist at all. They experience life in this crazy world and say it just doesn't make sense to them that God would exist.

Many assume God exists in a very distant place. Disconnected from them in anything to do with their daily lives. Others perceive God as a demanding tyrant who is controlling of everything they do and who is either very angry or deeply disappointed whenever they fail.

Whenever they don't measure up to his standard. Many of us walk through dark, difficult seasons of life and begin to assume that God doesn't care about us.

[10 : 43] Or at least not consistently. He seems to be hiding from me. Not revealing himself. I bet he doesn't care if I know him at all. Have you ever felt any of those things before?

I have. If you've ever drawn any of those conclusions about God, God says to us at Christmas, I want you to know what I'm really like.

Because I want you to know me personally, experientially. Not just something you've heard on a commercial. This is the way I'm supposed to be. Someone says. There's a phrase used repeatedly here to describe that glory of God that Jesus reveals to us.

It's that he's full of grace and truth. That's what God's like when you unwrap the present, so to speak, and start to experience him yourself.

That phrase, full of grace and truth, is a New Testament version of an Old Testament description God used for himself over and over.

[11 : 53] It's often translated, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. God tells Moses in Exodus 33 that this is his glory.

It's his goodness expressed unfailingly to people who fail. Steadfast love and faithfulness. When we read that God is full of grace and truth, that's what he's saying.

That he is unfailingly good to people who fail to be good. No one else is like that. No one else is always good, no matter how other people treat them.

But it's what the incarnation shows God to be. It's not just something that we hear about him. He has demonstrated it to us. It's not slick advertising.

It's what he has shown us in the flesh come to be full of grace and truth. There are historians who believe in Jesus as God, as well as many who don't believe him to be God, who will testify to a baby named Jesus.

[13 : 01] Born about 2,000 years ago in the Middle East, who walked and talked and became a man, who did many wonderful things, attested by many eyewitnesses, and eventually was killed on a cross.

And purported to have come back to life and been seen by many after that. And so we've walked through the incarnation, how God has demonstrated this faithful grace in time and space right here, up close and personal for us.

When the word becomes flesh, God breaks into the darkness of this world with light. He shows us that he refuses to leave us alone in our pain, but rather runs toward our suffering, because he values us more than his own comfort.

He even bears our sins on the cross. And in so doing, he shows us that even the one thing that should have been able to keep a holy God distant from us can never separate us from him.

And the reason that our sin can't keep us from God is that he loves us too much. So much, in fact, that he wants to adopt us into his family forever as his very own children.

[14 : 23] What an amazing God. It's his glory to love like this. To be unfailingly good to people who fail to be good.

That's what God is like. He's full of grace and truth. He loves you. And he won't stop loving you. He's born as a baby and goes to a cross so that you will know him and know that you can trust him. See, because this world is, as God promised it would be, difficult often, God wanted us to know what he's really like.

Because there are days that it doesn't feel like that, aren't there? There are a lot of counterfeit pictures of God out there these days. When you begin to wonder if God could really be like that, God, if I could only see you myself, if I could only hear your voice, then I could know that you are really like this.

Listen, what you need to see in that moment is Jesus. To remember Jesus. He's the one in whom God has shown us fully and finally what he's really like.

[15 : 40] Remember how God unwrapped himself and came so that you could experience him. You don't have to wonder, will God be like that for me?

Will he be like that for me? Full of grace and truth? Unfailingly good, even when I fail to be good? Yes, he will.

That's exactly what he's like. Jesus is the perfect image of God. He can be trusted in your pain. He can be depended on in your weakness.

He can be called on in your desperation. He does love you in your failure no matter how big you think it is. Can you believe that?

Won't you believe that? He loves you and came and was born at Christmas so that you would know him. Don't look anywhere else to figure out what God is like.

[16 : 41] Look at his son who has perfectly and fully and for you personally made God known.

What a glorious gift Jesus unwrapped for us. That's actually what we celebrate at this table, isn't it? What is God like?

How do I know what he's like for me? We're going to unwrap these gifts from him. We're going to unwrap the bread, which is his body, and the cup, which is his blood.

And we're going to taste what God is like. That he would come and take the death that we deserved in order that we could know life with him forever.

That he would love us that much, even when we didn't deserve it. That's what God is like.

Remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11. He said, In the same way also he took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

[18 : 00] Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Friends, we're so glad that you're here with us tonight.

Old friends, new friends, all of you. In case you're not familiar with this sacrament, it is a sign and seal of God's promises to us, which were fulfilled for us fully and finally in Jesus.

His promises to love us always. To forgive our sins. To be faithful to us forever. So if you don't trust Jesus as the one who has shown God to you, who has restored your relationship with God, then don't come and eat this bread and drink this cup and pretend outwardly something that is not true of you inwardly, that you trust in him.

I would invite you still to come. And come forward to this table and let us pray with you. And we're going to be praying with groups as we come. And we'd love for you still to come and pray with you as you celebrate Christmas and contemplate who Jesus is.

But those of you who are here who may not be used to coming to Southwood, but who trust Jesus as your Savior, we want you to know this is not Southwood's table. It's not a Presbyterian table.

[19 : 32] This is the Lord's table. Jesus sets this table. He is the one who qualifies anyone to be here. You don't come because you're worthy enough. You come because he loves you and has given himself for you.

And so if you trust him, if you have been baptized as a member of any church who preaches the gospel of salvation by faith in Christ alone, that your only hope is a God who is unfailingly good to people who fail to be good, then you please come and eat with him and with us tonight.

Let me pray and then we will come to this table together. Father, might we come and taste how much you love us.

We know that this is why Christmas happened, because you were committed not just to being born, but to living and ultimately dying for us, giving your life to save ours.

And so we thank you. We ask that you would set aside these very common elements for a sacred purpose in our hearts that we might believe for the first time or again or in a new way again tonight how much you love us.

[20 : 59] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

Amen.