

Sermon Text for December 24, 2021 – Christmas Eve Service

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Isaiah 60:1-3, John 1:1-18 **“Jesus the baby given to us by God”**

Last Sunday I gave you the challenge of waking up every morning and personalizing Isaiah 60 as verses directed to you. So, how is it going? Have you felt the glory of the Lord rising upon you throughout the day? Have you experienced over this week the Lord rising up on you and his glory appearing over you? This evening as we see Jesus presented to us as a baby, given to us as a gift from God, it is through Jesus this evening that the glory of the Lord has risen up on us, that we have experienced the Savior.

This evening, this night, the image of light is incredibly powerful. Here is what Craig Barnes, the president of Princeton Theological Seminary, sent out to us as alumni: We have always believed Jesus Christ was born at night, when it was dark. Darkness is what our newspapers mostly describe. It is what COVID-19 brought into the world, and what refugees try to escape. Darkness is what lingers in our hearts after we have been hurt. It tempts us to despair. And yet, it is easiest to see the light of salvation in the dark. May the light of Christ shine in your home this Christmas.

We gather together this evening as a concert of voices that proclaim that the light of God undoubtedly is shining in the darkness, and the darkness simply cannot overcome it. So this evening we are continuing our sermon series of Jesus the baby. We began by looking at Jesus the baby conceived out of wedlock, Jesus the baby placed in a manger, Jesus the baby visited by the shepherds, Jesus the baby presented in the temple, and tonight Jesus the baby given to us by God.

The only Gospels that have the birth of Jesus are Matthew and Luke. Mark begins with John the Baptist as an adult so doesn't mention anything about Jesus' birth. John, well, we just heard John, covers the beginning of Jesus in his own unique way. John, as we saw, begins with the Word who was present since the beginning of creation. We see in vs.14 of this Scripture that Jesus, the Son, God himself, took on flesh and became one of us, as a baby. This is where we find our birth narrative for John, even though it is not a description of a Hallmark baby, but rather the description of a God who chose to take on flesh, who chose to be present in the darkness as a baby, to be present in the darkness while he hung on the cross, to be present in the darkness of the grave, and finally, to come out into the light and cast light on all of us in his resurrection. That is the story of our Jesus, which begins this evening with his birth.

So while we have been focusing these weeks on the birth of and the infancy of Jesus, Christmas is really as much about our belief in Jesus, who do we believe Jesus actually is and what has Jesus done for us. We read in vs.2 a second emphasis on the fact that the Son, this Jesus, was present from the very beginning, from even the beginning of creation. Jesus the baby, we should understand, was given to us by God at a specific time for a specific date, even while we say that God transcends all time and all human constructs of dates.

God's purpose from the beginning of time was to, as vs.4 states, give us life. Jesus the baby given to us by God was for the purpose of giving us life. It is not to give us darkness, but rather to give us life, not to give us death, but to give us life. On this Christmas Eve we celebrate as vs.5 states, that the light has come into this world and the darkness has not overcome it, has not conquered, has not vanquished it. As we read in vs. 11 the darkness is those who did not accept him. He came as a baby conceived out of wedlock, born in a manger, visited by the shepherds, presented at the temple, but the world did not know him. That is our Jesus. That is our approach to Jesus, which is what so much of this story is about.

If we were only to believe, look at vs.12, if we were only to respond as the shepherds did, who with much haste made their way to be in his presence, or like Simeon and Anna did celebrated his presence in their midst, vs.12 tells us that we could be children of God if we would only believe. We have the power to be called children of God. As I John 3:2 states: Beloved, we are God's children *now!*

We are called to a belief that has its template and its foundation in vs.14, this is the story of Christmas. That God became flesh and lived among us. Jesus is God who lived among us. That is what Christmas is all about. This baby who was born is God living among us and given to us as the greatest gift given in all time.

The beauty of the candles is the light piercing the darkness. The origin of the believer, how we are able to be called believers in Jesus Christ is seen in this vs.12 as we are called children of God. What these verses tell us is that this is to be a story of a new race of humanity which is guided by the light and which has no limits to its demographics or its origin. We are a new race who has decided to follow Jesus, this is what the Gospel of John is all about. Believers in Jesus are those who have been made full with the gift of deity itself.

This whole Gospel, and it starts here in John in the beginning, records the struggle between those who acknowledge Jesus as God and those who do not. We find ourselves in a time of great division. There is no denying it. But what we hear John saying, is that there has always been a battle and a great divide. The battle between light and dark, good and evil, life and death, grace and sin. All of this is acknowledged in John.

But this evening as we celebrate the birth of Jesus the baby, John starting in vs.1 makes it very clear that we are not just celebrating a baby, but we are worshipping God, incarnate who walked on this earth with us. It is our choice whether or not we will declare as Thomas did later in the Gospel in chapter 20:28 “My Lord and my God”. If we do, then we will be a part of that new race called children of God. Amen.