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Trinity Episcopal Church

Isaiah 52: 7 – 10
Hebrews 1: 1 – 4 (5 – 12)

Psalms 98
John 1: 1 – 14

***“Shout with joy to the Lord, all you lands;
lift up your voice, rejoice and sing.
Sing to the Lord with the harp,
with the harp and the voice of song.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
shout with joy before the King, the Lord.”***

Merry Christmas! It is indeed a day for rejoicing and for singing. It is the day of the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus. It is the day of God, coming into our world and walking among us as one of us. It is the day of the birth of Jesus, the reflection of God's glory, and the exact imprint of God's very being.

Friday was the Winter Solstice, the longest night of the year. A time when we celebrate God's creation of the night and the dark as well as of the day and the light; the moon and the stars of the night sky as well as the sun in the blue sky. It's hard – perhaps impossible – to really and fully comprehend the idea of God. How do we bring together our ideas of a cosmic, transcendent God who stretches out the heavens and their glory with the intimate, imminent God who comes to dwell in our midst? A God of flesh and blood and human limitations. But it is that very same Creator God who has come this day. In the words of the evangelist, John, “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 came into being through him, and without him, not one thing came into being.”

Even though today is Christmas, none of our lessons present us with the sweet, nostalgic image of a helpless little infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Instead, we hear of a God who is Lord and King. A God who has brought salvation and victory. We hear of a sovereign and steadfast God who is revealed to us in great triumph. We hear of God as the Son of God, heir to the throne, and being higher than the angels. We hear of God as the Light of the World. And maybe that's a good thing that we hear of God this way on this day. Maybe it's a good thing that we are reminded of God's power and might, and of God coming not just as redeemer, but also as creator and sustainer.

We like to hear and tell the story of the baby, Jesus, because it's safe and warm and comfortable and non-threatening. However, a God who comes as the Creator of all things, as triumphant and sovereign Lord, well, that's not quite so comforting or non-threatening, is it? We need to see and hear and talk about both. We need the comfort and imminence of a tiny little hand reaching out from the manger to ours, and we need the security and transcendence of a God reaching a hand out across the heavens and across time. We need to see God acting in the world, and we also need to see God entering the world. As Christians, we cannot conceive of (nor do we *want* to conceive of) the creation of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them without Christ.

Matthew and Luke tell us the story of Jesus. How Jesus was born, and who Mary and Joseph were. About how the 'glory shone round about' the angels and the shepherds. And they are glorious stories indeed! John doesn't have any nativity stories, at least not in the same sense that Matthew and Luke do, but where Matthew and Luke tell us the story, John tells us the meaning. The age old stories from Matthew and Luke fill us with wonder, awe and tradition (and not a small amount of sentimentality). John fills us with mystery. John goes to the very heart of Christmas.

John doesn't have a story, but John does have this poem, or this hymn, right at the very beginning of his Gospel. It is to tell us right from the start who Jesus is and why Jesus comes into the world. John doesn't have a birth story, but John proclaims that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. John doesn't have any angels telling us that the one who is conceived by the Holy Spirit is the Son of God. However, John begins by telling us that the one who became flesh, the Word incarnate, has been with God from before the beginning, and that what

God is, the incarnate Word is, too. John doesn't have the Word-made-flesh wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, but John does let us know that God, as revealed in Jesus, is concealed by being veiled in flesh.

So, today, from the Gospel of John, we don't have a 'nativity' story, but what we do have is the incarnation of God. We have the Word of God among us as one of us. We have Emmanuel. We have God-with-us.

And if a mighty, transcendent God is difficult to comprehend, well, in truth so is God revealed in human form in Jesus Christ. If we, like John, understand Jesus to be the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures, then we have to see beyond the sweet baby lifted up into Mary and Joseph's protecting arms. We have to see Jesus as lifted up on the cross and then resurrected for us. In essence, we have to see beyond Christmas Day to why we *really* rejoice and sing. And John helps us to do just that. In the Word Incarnate, John writes, is life, and that life is the light of all people for all time.

The light which we have waited for in darkness has come upon us and it is a light beyond description, comparison or even imagination. It is the light of redemption and salvation. It is the light which lifts us out of sinfulness and into the presence of God. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews refers to Jesus as the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being. Wow. What a reflection that must be! But God understands us better than we could ever hope to understand ourselves, and so God comes with the lights turned low, the glory toned down. God comes in a form we are more able to bear, a baby-size package of heavenly radiance.

Most of us, in the corners of our hearts where we are still children, have waited all year long for this day. Just as people waited for centuries for the Messiah. This is why today we rejoice and sing. Perhaps it would be helpful for us to walk out of here today, though, not thinking of Christmas as particular day each year, but as a permanent way of being. As a permanent indwelling of the Holy among us. We go out into the world, proclaiming loud and clear, "Joy to the World!" so that others might see the glow of that holy light somehow reflected in us. And so that others might also know that Christ is born, not just in a manger 2000 years ago, but right here [our hearts] in each of us.

And we go out loudly and clearly proclaiming "Joy to the World" so that at some point when we least expect it, but most need it, we can sing it to ourselves again, and remind ourselves that God is not just cosmic, God is close by. There will be times ahead when we will be reminded of birth – a new baby or grandchild, springtime, a new start – and we can hearken back to our Savior's birth. And there will be times ahead when we will sorely need to be reminded of birth – a death, a loss, a barrenness – and we can also hearken back to our Redeemer's birth. Times when, as the song from Auntie Mame goes, "we need a little Christmas, right this very minute."

We Christians, of all people, are most blessed to be able to treasure the stirrings, the excitement, the rejoicing of Christmas within us always. So that, at some point of the year when we are farthest from the Son, when darkness seems to stretch endlessly, we can still rest in the assurance that the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.

Merry Christmas! God is with us. Rejoice, give thanks and sing.

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