

# *“Incarnation Inspiration”*

*Jeremiah 31:7-14, Ephesians 1:3-14, John 1:1-18*

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*January 5, 2020*

From the Pulpit

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A communion meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, January 5, 2020, Christmas 2, dedicated to the memory of Dick Kevan and to Pavan Peter as he faces surgery and recovery and always to the glory of God!

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*The Word Became Flesh*

*John 1:1-18*

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup> in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son full of grace, and truth. <sup>15</sup> (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") <sup>16</sup> From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> 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.

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*Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation.  
Amen.*

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We have just heard some of the most powerful, poetic, prophetic and precious words ever written about Jesus by anyone, anytime. They were penned by John, the "beloved disciple of Jesus," on the island of Patmos in Ephesus late in his life. The eldest author of our faith story was close to 100 when

he delivered these Christmas words, these Easter words, these TIMELESS words of love.

John was not interested in shepherds or angels, magi or their camels or gifts, not worried about Herod and his murderous ways. John was not smitten with the Baby of Bethlehem laid in a manger, in a stable, surrounded by a cast of cattle and other barn animals. He wasn't interested in the Holy Family. The last apostle to write his Gospel, long after Luke and Matthew wove their nativity story, wanted to give us a gift of a different nature altogether. He gave us the gift of Christ Jesus -not only what he heard Him say, but more clearly - what he FELT Jesus meant.

**John gives us the essence of Jesus Christ.** John ruminated on the Spirit of Christ for 70 years, when he gave us these words. For 70 years, he prayed and reflected. For 70 years he waited for the Spirit of Truth to reveal to him what he needed most to share about his beloved Rabbi, Lord and Savior. William Barclay writes, “Behind this Gospel is the whole church at Ephesus, the whole company of saints, the last of the apostles, the Holy Spirit and the Risen Christ himself” (William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1975, p. 24).

**John gives us a gift in his Gospel of grace and truth.** These words are our treasures. These words point us to the Inspiration of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. By the time John writes, the essence of the Risen Christ has touched the lives of millions of people, most of whom are in the Greco-Roman world, scattered across the islands and nations surrounding the Mediterranean

Sea, thousands of miles from the footpaths of Palestine and the people of Jewish faith and heritage from whom Jesus came. By the late First Century, the story of the Risen Christ has transformed from a narrative of people, places, and parables from Palestine to a global movement sweeping the world.

**This growing movement in the late First Century want to know the essence of our savior.** They need to know if they are giving their lives to follow him, who is Jesus Christ? What was his nature? What were the qualities of his being? What was he like? What clarity of character do we come to know about him? How did he teach (not just what did he teach)? How did he heal (not just whom did he heal)? Was he honest? Was he trustworthy and true? What kind of a leader was he? Was he simply a man with magical powers or in fact, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God?

People want to know. To lay down your life for the (supposed) Savior of the World is a really big deal. You need to know if he is IN FACT, the one for whom we have been waiting or if we should look for another.

John offers us insights into the essence of our Savior when he writes that before the world had shape and form, “THE WORD of God,” the “LOGOS” was alive!

**“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word WAS God...”** Both Greek and Hebrew revere the “Logos” or “The Word.” “The Word” was the agent of Creation, the source of truth in the message from of the

prophets, the ultimate revelation of God, the living picture of God's holiness and "The One in Whom all things hold together." But, always before, "the Word" was from God, of God, in God.

John tells us here a radical and new word about the essence of The Word when he writes, "The Word" becomes Flesh and Dwells among us FULL of Grace and Truth. This is mind-blowing for the first listeners to this word of God. Radical for both the Jewish and Pagan people.

This WORD, is the essence of God, become human and filling All of Life, All of Light for All Humanity. Jesus Christ is a pure beam of light which shines in the darkness and overcomes the darkness and changes everything. In his presence, the darkness will be gone. His Glory is of a Father's ONLY Son, filled to the brim with grace and truth. He is close to the Father's heart. He is grace upon grace.

**Life. Light. Grace. Truth. Love.** These are the essentials of Jesus Christ. These are the essentials of God. These are the essentials of the Holy Spirit.

This isn't a word game. This isn't poetic license about a man from Nazareth. These are not qualities and characteristics with which to play around. These are the characteristics which define the very essence of God – now bestowed and shown most fully in a divine and human presence known to us as Jesus Christ.

**THIS Word of God is worth following.** This Word made flesh and dwelling among us is worth giving our lives to. This Word is alive. This Word is real. This Word is the living, breathing Son of the Most High. This Word is “Glory” in every way, shape and form.

**This Word is truly incarnation inspiration!** As we stand at the opening to a new year, a new decade, a year in which we will send summer Olympians to Tokyo, Japan in July and elect a president in November, and hopefully stay out of a new war all year long, it is tempting to juxtapose the power of John’s prologue with the tempest of our times.

It is tempting to talk about saving our planet – which we must do now or never. It is also tempting to launch into support for our friends in the United Methodist Church as they face a denominational divorce after a 43-year battle to accept and ordain LGBTQ clergy, to allow marriage based on love and not one particular sexual orientation, and simply the Jesus way of loving and accepting all God’s children. It is tempting to talk about bullies, bombs and bullets. Believe me, I would like to rumble (and yes, I want to ramble a bit, too... although I have a new year’s resolution about that one...).

**But John’s Word calls us to higher ground.** The aged author of the most beautiful words about our Lord and Savior grounds us all in pure love.

Thomas Merton reflects this way about the Incarnation in his book, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. Merton writes:

*I have the immense joy of being a member of a race in which God became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are... There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.*

*It was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed.*

**Do you see how it works?** As we stand in the presence of pure life, pure light, pure grace, pure truth, we are all called to see each other for the absolute beauty that each of us walks around with. We, who are walking around like the shining sun, we need to breathe deep the epiphany of God's Pure Love, known to us in Jesus Christ.

And now, as we come to God's table of grace, let our hearts and minds be wide open to Christ because in John's words: *"From his fullness, we have all received, grace upon grace"* (John 1:16). Amen.