

A Christmas Day communion meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus Ohio, Christmas Day, December 25, 2011, dedicated to my father and mother, Herman and Lorene Ahrens, to Arlene Reynolds and to all who have brought Christmas alive through Bethlehem on Broad Street for the past 26 years, where the Spirit of the Living God has “pitched her tent” each Christmas at 444 East Broad Street and welcomed everyone in, and always to the glory of God!

“God’s Word Alive Among Us”

***Isaiah 52:7-10; John 1:1-14;
Luke 2:1-20***

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Let us pray: May the Light of God shine in each of our hearts this day. As we receive the Light, may we be God’s light to others. In the name of the newborn Christ, we pray. Amen.

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In our Christmas Day scripture texts, there is no star. There are no angels. There are no shepherds. No wise men. No King Herod. This is no inn and no stable. No manger. No sheep. No cattle “lowing.” There is no Bethlehem of Judea. There is no holy family. No Mary. No Joseph. And absolutely no mention of Jesus.

In our Christmas Day readings, Isaiah gives us only the beautiful feet of a prophet on an unnamed mountain announcing “peace.” We have singing breaking forth - but it comes from the ruins of Jerusalem, not angels from the realms of glory. We have God baring his holy arm before the eyes of

all the nations - and none of us are sure what that looks like.

In John's Gospel, we have the Light of God. We have the glory of God. We have "the Word Made Flesh" dwelling among us full of grace and truth. But I cannot emphasize this enough; our texts from Holy Scripture today do not lift up the name of Jesus or the story of his Holy birth. It is Christmas Day and the Holy Scriptures are not talking about Jesus!

What are we to make of all this? With no Jesus, how do we celebrate Christmas? Eleven hours ago, Jesus was all we could talk and sing about. From late last night to early this morning, what has happened to our Savior? Why do we hear nothing more of his birth to Mary? Each one of us wants to play detective and figure out, "Where in the world is Jesus born in Bethlehem of Judea?"

I have an idea. It is a simple idea. But for this Christmas morning, it may just work. Do you want to hear it?

I believe God is counting on US today. God has pulled us into his story of salvation. God wants you (and me) to **BE** the story! God wants us to bring alive the "Word Made Flesh" in our lives. God is counting on Jesus Christ to be made manifest in you and me this morning - and for all the rest of our days. Now, God's story has been born inside each one of us! We have become the Christ in Christmas to one another.

John tells us, "***The Word was Made Flesh and Dwelt among us***" the actual translation of "dwelt among us" is this "*pitched his tent in us.*" In other words, God has come into our hearts this Christmas Day and "*pitched His tent in us.*" God has taken up residence - in us. We are God's home. We are God's dwelling place. God has become Christ in us. He is right Here - in us and around us in others. God's name is glorious in the essence of our being! God has "occupied" the center of our souls.

My father, Dr. Herman C. Ahrens, Jr. is 87½ years young. For 32 years, dad was the editor of a Christian magazine called (simply) *Youth*. Dad loved writing and speaking to teens and young adults. He is a poet, an author, a lover of Jesus. He is also one of the finest Christians I know.

In December 1980, when Dad was 56, he wrote and published the following poem based on John 1. Dad captures the spirit of God dwelling in us. Listen to his poem - written to teen-agers so many Christmases ago, but just as real and relevant for each one of us today. I pray that you may grasp the meaning of God's desire to pitch his tent in your heart.

The title is *The Word is Alive Among Us*.

“The Word Is Alive Among Us”

By Herman C. Ahrens, Jr.

You are the only you, but you are not alone.
You are loved, when least expected.
You are capable in ways yet unknown.
You are free to be the best possible you.
You are sacred as a child of God.
God loves you. God created all out of love.

You know God best through Jesus Christ.
His birth is God's promise.
His life is God's example to you.
His rising from death is hope.
God's spirit is alive.
God is with you always.
You can trust God.

As Creator, only God knows all.
God's revelation continues today.

Set free that of God in you.
Help free that of God in others.

Activate the power of God in your life.

Open your eyes.

Listen with your soul.

Question with conscience.

Act responsibly, firmly, compassionately.

Let the healing spirit flow.

Let the reconciling love grow.

Expand your world

to include all peoples everywhere.

Be an influence for good by what you do and who you are.

With all your being

love God,

love others,

love self.

Peace be with you.

(Written by Dr. Herman C. Ahrens, Jr. and published by United Church Press in *Youth* magazine, December 1980)

“The Word Is Alive Among Us” today! God is calling us to the high and holy calling of being “Christians” this Christmas Day. The word Christian literally means, “little Christ.” Not one of us is called to be the fullness of Christ. However, each of us is called to be “little Christs” to one another and all we meet.

So come and be the Christmas story to each other. Come and be **“The Word Is Alive Among Us.”** With the work of Christmas ever before us, receive the late, great Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman’s poem *The Work of Christmas* as a special gift today.

The Work of Christmas

By Howard Thurman

*When the song of the angels is stilled ,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost
To heal the broken
To feed the hungry
To release the prisoner
To rebuild the nations
To bring peace among all people
To make music in the heart.*

Be God's "work of Christmas." Be God's story this Christmas morning! The creator of the universe and each one of us has pitched his tent in your heart. May you shine the light of the newborn Christ to others today and forevermore! May you shine God's light and love filled with grace and truth. Alleluia! Amen.