

John 1:1-14 (CEB)

In the beginning was the Word  
and the Word was with God  
and the Word was God.

<sup>2</sup>The Word was with God in the beginning.

<sup>3</sup>Everything came into being through the Word,  
and without the Word  
nothing came into being.

What came into being

<sup>4</sup> through the Word was life,  
and the life was the light for all people.

<sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

<sup>6</sup>A man named John was sent from God. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light.<sup>8</sup>He himself wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.

<sup>9</sup>The true light that shines on all people  
was coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup>The light was in the world,  
and the world came into being through the light,  
but the world didn't recognize the light.

<sup>11</sup>The light came to his own people,  
and his own people didn't welcome him.

<sup>12</sup>But those who did welcome him,  
those who believed in his name,  
he authorized to become God's children,

<sup>13</sup> born not from blood  
nor from human desire or passion,  
but born from God.

<sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh  
and made his home among us.

We have seen his glory,  
glory like that of a father's only son,  
full of grace and truth.

The word of God for the People of God.

**Thanks be to God.**

I was 22 years old and just about as naive as they come. I was the Pastoral Intern for the summer, serving under the guidance of another pastor and learning to preach and teach and offer guidance and care to a congregation. So, one day during that summer, the good news made it to the church office: the Dilbourn family's new baby had been born! The Pastor was gone, so I did what I thought a Pastor ought to do: I hopped in the car and headed to the hospital to greet the baby and congratulate the family.

I arrived on the maternity floor and had no trouble getting my special name tag. I headed straight for the room, bouncing along the hallway, thinking what a great Pastor I was becoming. I knocked on the door--and nothing happened. I knocked again, and it opened, and there was Alex, the husband. "Hey! Congratulations, I hear we have a baby!" Alex looked confused and annoyed and distracted, but he gathered up his patience and said, "No, WE don't have a baby yet, she's--" and before he could finish, Julie, his wife, let me know in her own loud and clear...and loud way that she was right in the middle of labor. Alex turned back to me and I gathered up his facial expression and Julie's groan into the most profound prayer that has ever been uttered at the door of a delivery room--just three little words: "Oh dear Lord."

I was an unexpected visitor, at an unexpected hour.

I can only imagine the faces of Mary and Joseph when their manger scene was invaded by these dirty, smelly, woolly keepers of sheep. Why on Earth are these people here? Who are they? How did they find us, and what are they going to do?

If we are like anyone in this story, if we can relate to anyone in this beautiful, simple drama of God becoming human, perhaps we are like the shepherds. Minding their own business, going about work and life, and suddenly coming face to face with the holy. "Do not be afraid, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people," the angel proclaims. "to you is born this day in the city of David a savior, the Messiah, the Lord." To you.

Perhaps the shepherds panicked when they heard the angel's words: "to me?" (They look at each other) "It's not my baby!"

But the angel says it: To you! To you, Shepherds. Those two words are so striking; they seem so out of place--born, to you. Shouldn't these words be directed to Mary and Joseph? Imagine a baby is born, and the doctor does not hand him off to the daddy waiting outside the delivery room, no, instead, the doctor takes the baby down the hallway to the nurse's station, or the cafeteria, and says, "Look, he's yours!" Born to you!

What does this have to do with me? Luke gets at the absolute paradox happening in this moment, in this birth: first, the angel proclaims good news of great joy for all the people. All the people! Everyone! Good news for the whole grand world! And then, in the next breath, he brings it right down: "To you." "To you is born this day a savior." It's as if Jesus is theirs--held within their arms, even as he gathers up all things in heaven and on earth into his own arms.

This good news is cosmic--this tiny scene, in a single barn, in a sleepy little town, has reshaped the future of the entire world. In this event, God has once again declared light for a dark world. In this birth, God has laid claim to all of creation, refusing to hand the world over to all of those things that would seek to destroy it-- refusing to hand us over to racism and violence and fear of those who are different; refusing to hand us over to war and the greed that drives it; refusing to hand us over to what Paul calls the powers and principalities of this world that separate people from God, from creation, and from each other.

And yet, this cosmic event is deeply personal. The truth of Christmas is that because God looked down to a manger in Bethlehem one night and said, "I will go there," now it is possible for God to look into each of our lives, into the whirl of joy and struggle and love and loss and laughter and fear--God looks into all of that whirlwind, and God says, "I will go there." I will go there with the family trying to

hold it together, united, but fragile. I will go there, with you into the wilderness of mental illness. I will go there, with you into the holiday paradox of great joy and deep loneliness. I will go there, with you, to the struggle for a job, for justice, for safety. I will go there, with you in the unknown, uncertain times of life, when no answer is clear and you wonder who to trust. I will go there.

Good news of great joy, for all the people. To you is born this day, a savior.

And so the shepherds go, and they find him, savior for the world, savior for each of them. They find him wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger--not a bed fit for a king, but an empty animal trough, the place where those who hunger know they will find food. Already, in these first moments of life, of incarnation, we see that God comes to feed the world with his very self, with grace, with the self-giving love that will change the end of the story, of my story, and your story. And gathered around that child, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, unexpected visitors all became family. So we gather tonight, at the place where those who hunger know they will find food: around the table, a trough of our own, where lies the bread of life, and where we are made the family of God--God, who has come right here, to us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.