

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

December 24, 2023

Old Testament Reading; Isaiah 52: 7-10

Responsive Reading; Psalm 98

Epistle Reading; Hebrews 1: 1-12

Gospel Reading; Luke 2: 1-7 & John 1;1-14

Sermon; **This is IT**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; Hope, Peace, Joy, Love. Christ...and it is all for you.

Today we not only lit the candle of Love, but we also lit the Christ candle. God is Love and Jesus is God.

Our lectionary has a three-year cycle of scriptures. Two of these tell us the “reason for the season” at Christmas and the other tells us the “reason for the reason.” This is that year.

Year A and year C feature Gospel readings from Luke and Matthew that together give a beautiful description of a love story that makes the Hallmark channel green with envy. No other love story in history is as beautiful and deeply meaningful

as the love story of God giving His own son to a young girl and a devout, trusting, loving, human father of humble means. Love stories are the reason Kleenex was invented, and this is the best of the best. This story is too important to skip so I added the abbreviated version from Luke to the Gospel readings for today. Although the nativity story is captivating, it gains even more shock and awe when we look back past the stable.

In our Old Testament reading Isaiah tells of the beauty and satisfaction of hearing and realizing extremely good news. He not only proclaims the glory of the all the nations seeing the salvation of God but also exults the feet of the messenger lucky enough to be the one to proclaim it.

Our Psalm lesson bursts into singing the praises of God and what He will do that cannot go unnoticed by the world. Both humans and nature itself will rejoice in what God will do.

Hebrews points out the difference between prophets and Christ as well as Angels and Christ. Prophets only give snippets of what is real while Jesus has the whole picture. Jesus is superior to the angels as the angels will worship Jesus as Lord.

This said the Gospel of John makes it perfectly clear who Jesus is in reference to God and to man.

First off, Jesus did not come into being in that stable or even upon His conception in Mary's womb. Secondly, Jesus did not

become “the Christ” at the empty tomb. Jesus was part of the God Head since before time began.

In the beginning was the word. Jesus is the Word, and the Bible is the word of the Word. Jesus was with God AND Jesus was God. Here the gospel writer is pointing out the Trinity of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is three in one as He is three distinct functions of one complete God. This concept might be compared to the human body in that the human body is comprised of the head, the body, and the breath (life). All three must be there to have a living, breathing competent individual. Jesus is God. God is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. All three are God and all three are equal parts of one God.

John then goes on to say that Jesus created everything in the universe and not one thing that was created was not created by Jesus.

This becomes extremely marvelous and complicated. This means that Jesus created Mary, then Mary delivered Jesus, and then Jesus delivered Mary in her salvation. The song Mary Did You Know, says this a whole lot prettier than I do. Anywho!

Then John says, “In Him was life.” This does not mean that Jesus was alive, it means we are all alive because of Jesus. OK, that sounds important. Just a side note here, there are two

kinds of life, physical life, and spiritual life. Hold onto that point, it will come back to haunt you later.

Then John says that “The life was the light of man.” All right let us try to grab this concept. Not only does Jesus give us life, but Jesus also gives us direction for our lives. Jesus puts that light into us. Light is important. Darkness is prevalent in this world and darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Now guess what, Jesus has given us His light to penetrate the darkness of the world.

Is this starting to make that whole business at the nativity seem a whole lot more intense?

Oh ya, then Jesus says that the darkness cannot defeat the light.

OK, now we are talking. But how do we get that light into the darkness?

SHZAM!

In steps John the Baptist. John the Baptist was not the light, but God sent him to be a witness to the light, John was to show that Jesus was the light, and that through him they could also see the light and be able to use this light to disperse the darkness. Remember Isaiah? “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who

proclaims salvation.” What a beautiful and wonderful mission that was appointed to John the Baptist and to anyone else who dares to share this privilege and responsibility.

This light that John witnessed was the “true” light which would be the light of the world. Not everyone that “saw the light” would accept it but those who do would be given the right to become the children of God.

OK children of the light, children of God are you ready for the spectacular climax?

I pointed out that Jesus was life and that that life was the light of the world. I also pointed out that there are two kinds of life, physical and spiritual. God is a spirit and must be worshiped in spirit.

In Revelation 21: 3&4 it says, “And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

For those who have the spiritual life and are the children of God the New Jerusalem has come down on that first Christmas and God Himself dwells with us. Oh, the physical world will not see

it but to those of us who have claimed Jesus as our Lord and Savior we have Emmanuel i.e. God with us, and He will walk with us through everything that happens to us. Unlike the nonbeliever, we do not have to stumble in the darkness because we have the light in Jesus and because we have Jesus we are the reflectors of that light. Because of the reason for the reason, we have the Hope, Peace, Joy, Love and light of our season in Jesus Christ. God is for us, and we are blessed.

Hallelujah and Amen!