

John 1:1-18
The Word Dwelt Among Us
Christmas Eve Meditation

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How do you come to know someone? How does someone make themselves known to you?

There are many ways – you can read about someone, maybe watch a documentary or video about some part of that person's life, you can use snapchat or FaceTime, you can scroll through their Facebook account or twitter feed, you can observe them interacting with other people or working at their job, you can have a conversation with them. You come to know someone, you come to know who they are, by noticing how they express themselves in word and deed, by observing their self-expression, their self-revelation.

So then how do we get to know God – God who is invisible? God whom no one has ever seen? God whom we cannot hear? God who creates? God who is holy? God who is above all and in all? God who is eternal – having no beginning and no ending?

Well, in the Old Testament, God revealed himself to his people in many ways. I will mention two this evening. First, we know God revealed himself to his people through the law that he gave to Moses at Mt Sinai. The disciple John reminds us in his overture, which is the beginning of his gospel account of Jesus Christ, that the law was given through Moses. The law was a witness to God's grace and truth. The law is the self-revelation of God because the law is an expression of the holy and righteous God.

Second, we know God revealed himself through the tabernacle. In the Old Testament, the tabernacle fulfills various functions. The tabernacle was the central part of life for God's people. It was the place where the Law of Moses was preserved. It was where God dwelt. It was the

place of revelation. It was where sacrifices were made. It was the very heart and centre of Israel's worship. The tabernacle was where God was revealed, where God was worshipped, where God made himself known to his people.

For hundreds of years, for many generations, God's people knew him through the law – which is to say, the word of God - and through the tabernacle. And then the greatest of all mysteries, the greatest of all gifts, the greatest of all wonders happened. *The Word became flesh and made his tabernacle among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Tonight we have told the story about God's only begotten Son, the Logos - Jesus Christ - becoming human and dwelling among us. Here is Jesus Christ – the one who was in the very beginning, the one through whom all things were made, the one who gives life and light to the world – and He has come into the world to dwell among us. The Scriptures tell us many different reasons why Jesus came: Matthew tells us that this baby would be called Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. When Mark introduces us to Jesus it has to do with the coming of God's Kingdom. The historian Luke emphasizes that Jesus will be given the throne of David and will reign forever over a Kingdom that has no end.

John chooses a different aspect to emphasize. John simply says *The Word dwelt among us*. Not the Word saved us. Not the Word reconciled us to God. Not the Word brought God's Kingdom to earth. The Word made his dwelling among us. The Greek word to dwell means to pitch one's

tent, to encamp, to tabernacle. The Word became flesh and tented among us. The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. Why does John use that verb?

Well, John understands that more fundamental than our need for salvation from our sin, deeper than our need for God's Kingdom to come on earth, deeper than all that is our greatest need and desire: to be with the Triune God, to know the Eternal Living God, to behold the glory of Yahweh. So John chooses the word that is used to describe the visible presence of God among humans. It is the same verb we find in the glorious promise in Revelation 21:3 "*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home – the tabernacle - of God is among mortals. He will dwell – tabernacle - with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them'*". This is the long-awaited hope and promise for every Christian believer and for the church: to eternally dwell with God and be his people.

And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. And we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth.

The wonder of the story, the same story we tell every year, is that God came to us, God tabernacled among us, he lived among us, he dwelt with us. Jesus Christ – God's only begotten Son – came to us so that He may reveal the Father to us, so that we may behold the glory of the Father, so that we would know who God the Father is, so that the invisible God would be made visible to us.

And what do we see in God? What do we behold in Jesus Christ? What do we learn who God is through Jesus Christ? God is full of grace and truth. In Jesus the fullness of grace and truth dwell. God is grace and God is truth. John writes: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

So what are we to do? John tells us in verse 16 that out of the fullness of Jesus we have all received grace upon grace. We are simply to receive his grace.

Jesus Christ – the Logos, the Word made flesh, the Son of God – came not only so that we may behold God the Father, not only to make the invisible God visible, not only to tabernacle among us, but so that we may receive grace. God – in Jesus – has come not just so that we may see grace but that we may receive grace, accept grace, welcome grace.

There is a difference between knowing someone and knowing something. The French language captures it well; there are two different words to describe to know: *connaitre* and *savoir*.

Connaitre refers to knowing someone, to being acquainted or familiar with someone. *Savoir* refers to knowing the facts about someone or something. We can know God in both these senses. We can know the facts about him and we can also know him personally.

We come to know him personally when we choose to receive his grace. So this Christmas season, let us tell this story and receive this story. The story about God becoming flesh and tabernacling among us. The story about God revealing himself to us in His Son. The story about

God's grace and truth. If God – the Word made flesh – has come to tabernacle among his people, let us receive him by pitching our tents around Him. Amen.