

## What if Jesus Lived Next Door?

Intro: The Christmas season is “wrapping up.” (no pun intended)

We have put away our decorations here in the sanctuary, taken the advent wreath candle out. You have probably put your decorations away at home. I had a boss one time that his main chore the day after Christmas was to take that live tree down and move it to the curb. My co-worker always kidded him about it.

Anyway is Christmas over? Not according to the liturgical calendar. This is “the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Christmas” or if I had chosen I could have preached “Epiphany Sunday” even though Epiphany is not until Tuesday. So we are going to call this the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Christmas because I have chosen to talk today about John’s gospel and how he portrays the Christmas story.

John has a unique way of presenting the “Christmas Story.” John in his writings, as Edward Markquart puts it, will use philosophical categories like “The Logos, life, and the light.” Rev. Markquart says that a modern analogy of John is he is like a reporter who is a university professor who teaches philosophy at the University of Chicago and reports his observations to students and faculty of all colleges and universities around the globe. With that said, let’s look at a little of this scripture and how it presents a Christmas Story to us. (

John says that in the beginning was “The Word.” The Greek word for “Word” was “Logos.” This “word” was there from the beginning was with God from the creation of the universe. From the opening verse of John’s gospel, the reader is to understand that Jesus was is fully God. (Markquart 2)

Jesus was this “Word,” this Life, this Light, that John portrays in this gospel. I want to focus however, on verse 14, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” In verse 16 we hear, “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” So Jesus lived among us, gave us power to become children of God, born not of blood or of the flesh but of God.

So in John, we have to think abstractly, which I will have to admit is a little difficult for me. I am more tangible person. I tend to want to think of that tangible Christmas with the baby in a manger, the shepherds, the wisemen, talking donkeys, and sheep like in our Christmas Eve service. It makes such a simpler story. Then comes John with all this talk of “The Word.” This puts it in a new perspective. So in my spirit of having a “tangible” message out of this somewhat abstract message, I “zeroed” in on this thought of “the Word became flesh and lived among us”

Have you ever had someone move into your neighborhood and you wondered what they would be like? Was it someone who would be neighborly, keep to themselves, or have wild parties?

Unfortunately, in many neighborhoods today, people keep to themselves. They don’t know who their neighbors are. I just recently moved into the home that I knew growing up except for the first six years of my life. It was my parents’ home in a neighborhood that was built in the 60’s. Most of the neighbors, immediately around me I do know. They are the parents of my friends, the children I use to play with growing up. It is comfortable being in a place where I know my neighbors look out for one another and care for one another. But when someone new moves in, do we feel an uneasiness? In the years of integration, when black families began to move into white neighborhoods, that became uncomfortable. People were worried about property values going down because or what “disturbance” might occur. There was not a sense of welcoming. We do get uncomfortable when someone moves in that we are just not sure of.

Where am I going with this? What if Jesus lived next door? How comfortable would that be? Jesus was not very welcomed in his own hometown when he came to speak at the synagogue he was rejected by his friends and neighbors because they didn't know who he was. (Sermonhelp,3) The scriptures today even refer to this when it says "He came to what was his own and his own people did not except him."

How would we welcome Jesus if he did live among us? A pastor put this question to his Church council. His response from one of the deacons "Well it would be nice for the children if he came." (Sermonhelp,3) Does this ideal of Jesus living next door cramp our lifestyle? Will we have to make sure we are on our best p's and q's? Will we take a casserole over and welcome him in or be the neighbor who just doesn't have the time and doesn't want to get involved with someone else's business?

Jesus living next door might be a challenge—a good challenge. We would be witness to his love, his grace and his truth as portrayed in the scripture lesson today. We would witness his miracles or "signs" as John puts it in his gospels. Do we always have to be perfect and good to live next door to Jesus? Unfortunately our human nature doesn't always allow us to be perfect and good. But remember that from his "fullness" we have all received, grace upon grace."

If Jesus lived next door, would you invite him to Elon Community Church? How many of your neighbors have you invited to church? Now I might see a little squirming going on out there. Of course we would want to say yes we would gladly invite him into our church because we are doing His work in this church, in the community, and in the world. Or we might say, no, he probably would prefer St Mark's where there are more people and louder music—we'll let somebody else invite him to church, He might think I am too pushy and I don't want to slam "religion" down his throat.

What if Jesus lived next door? Are we all not children of God that represent Jesus and his teachings? Our text teaches us in verse 12 " But to all who received him, believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." So we need to carry on as children of God, that Light that John's gospel talks about. We should have no fear of living next door to Jesus or his followers. Now, with dogmas and doctrines today, that can sometimes cause conflict among the followers but we need to be tolerant and loving even though our beliefs differ, we need to focus on the "light" that we are following.

If Jesus lived next door, He would teach us what it means to "love our neighbors as ourselves." In the spirit of the Christmas season, it is the time of year for giving. Further in John's gospel is one of the most quoted text of the Bible, God's ultimate gift. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

In closing, I would like to share with you an amazing story that I read this week in the "American Profile." If Jesus lived next door to these folks, I think He would be proud. In 2002, Frank and Joan Gordan told their children, starting the next Christmas, they were going to change their gift giving plans. They were older, they had what they needed, and they wanted each next year was for them to take the money they would spend on them and put it towards something good for someone else. It could be done anytime during the year but what they had to do was to come back the following year and report on what they had done. Some of their "gifts" were, providing recreational activities for economically disadvantaged kids through a Christian teen center in their community, reading books aloud to residents of a local nursing home, taking a homeless man to

breakfast, and one along with co-workers at Starbucks sponsored a family at Christmas whose mother was stricken with a brain tumor and the father was laid off from work. The article says, “The gift giving rules are simple: ‘It has to be done within the year, and it can be either monetary or giving of your time and energy in some way.’” The family now records these stories of giving and shares them together each Christmas. What a simple but great way of sharing the light of Christ through giving of time, talents, and money to honor the “Word” that became flesh through the baby in a manger to one who later died on a cross. (Aldrich, 6-8)

The Word became flesh and lived among us. So I ask you what would do if Jesus lived next door?

#### Works Sited

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