

#7 15-16

Psalm 147:12-20

Jeremiah 31:7-14

Ephesians 1:3-14

John 1:10-18

Grace Upon Grace

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. THIS IS THE WORD OF OUR LORD . . .

Well, it is the ninth day of Christmas, so, Merry Christmas! Three more days of the Christmas season before we enter into the season of Epiphany, which begins on the 6th and ends on Ash Wednesday, when Lent begins, on February 10th. So, in a way, we are contemplating Christ's birth and his presentation to the world right up to when we contemplate his suffering and his death. Of course, because of denominationalism, this varies from church to church. And being Disciples, we can do anything we want, as long as it is in love to the Bible, the living God, Jesus and each other. That's my story and I'm sticking to it . . .

On this last Sunday in Christmas we have been given the text from John introducing who Jesus was to the world. I love the Gospel of John. It is so different from the other 3 Gospels, so beautiful, mystical, poetic . . . The author of John seems to be trying to offer the story of Christ in a version which is mysterious and unearthly - a total different genre than what had been accepted before.

This text begins with the thought that Jesus sort of secretly came into the world and when that happened, the world actually began, and because of this, there is a sort of another layer to human awareness that we need to kind of "work" to become aware of . . . "and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him . . . But to all who received him . . . he gave power to become children of God."

This sort of reminds me of some computer games in which you receive extra powers or lives, or insights if you find the right passage . . . it is all very exciting and you feel so lucky to have found that online secret thing!

And in a way, the gifts of Faith are just like that . . . slightly hidden, one has to work to find the mystery and make it work . . . and to find the mysterious powers, you have to want it more than life itself. Because life is obvious - we see it on the news - it is terrifying and feels hopeless. Life tells yells at us to be angry when our sense of fairness is tweaked. The world which does not recognize the mystery of the Christ child, is stagnant, consistent in the attitude that life will never change. The world without faith is a world of self satisfaction and mendacity.

But add faith into a "normal" life, and powerful secret things start happening. One starts to do "weird" things like imagine life from someone else's perspective, and adapt our own behavior in

order to share the experience of love on earth with them! Or to find ourselves in an emotional state and instead of seeking revenge and judging the other, we are sensitized to those emotions through the teachings of Christ and we seek to judge not, to turn the other cheek, to forgive, to love our enemies . . .

THIS is the secret life of faith in Christ - this is the gift given to humanity from this birth - this mysterious change in the world - through the changes in us. And when we get to feeling hopeless, we gather in the church for our medicine of community in faith. We share with each other the hope that our tiny faith will be enough to get us through the world of fears and hopelessness. This birth of God as a baby - is born in us. And as helpless and vulnerable as a baby is - so is this mystery of faith in us.

Faith is delicate, and yet, babies are more durable than we fear when we first encounter one, and if we are lucky babies ourselves, we have a lot of people looking out for us, so that we will grow into strong capable humans, able to protect others as we have been protected. Same goes for our faith. We gather in community to protect each other's faith, and help us all to grow in awareness of God in the world through Christ. The mystery of the known amongst the unknown!

"From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known."

We come to church seeking the mystery of God, and we find ourselves embroiled in a battle for the life of Christ. Are we clinging to our own perspectives which may speak the opposite of what Christ teaches? Because the mystery of this birth calls us into reflection and to ever expanding our knowledge of God. Often the world and our impulses ask of us to keep things small, understandable, worldly . . . and this mystery of the Word incarnate will forever be challenging us to let go of the world, trust the Spirit of God, listen to others and remember Christ's teachings . . .

Because we are facing the end of one year, we know what happened in 2015 ~ and yet there were powers working for good and evil over which we had no control. And here we are today, retrospective, wondering about some of the stuff that happened, and knowing all too well about some other stuff. But 2016! And new year!! The mystery of the unknown is before us! It is exciting! We make time to contemplate what we will be letting go from the past, and what we want to hang on to; what we hope for in the future, and trust that God will be with us for the mystery of our lives yet to be.

And because we know from our experiences, and we trust from this scripture, that regardless of what happens in 2016, we will not be alone; we will have each other here, and we have the living God, the one who was born in the flesh, and "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."

Let us take this day to say confidently that we look forward to this grace being revealed to us here at Hyattstown Christian Church in the coming year! We listen for the voice of God. We share our lives with each other in hope and confidence and we proclaim our inheritance with Christ: "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." Let us seek to be children of God now and forevermore! AMEN