

John 1:1-14

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Reconciled with God through Jesus' humanity

When a case goes to court or to trial there are a number of players involved. There is the judge, the lawyers, the plaintiff and the defendant, the jury, and witnesses. Each has a specific role or function in the proceedings and their work has an effect on the outcome of a trial. One cannot underestimate the importance of each, but today I want to focus on the role of the witness. A witness is a person who can provide relevant information on a particular subject. It may be the person witnessed a crime, or can speak to someone's character. The witness has the ability to influence how people perceive a person or situation. If you have ever been in an accident you are a witness to what happened. What you have to say is relevant.

But we witness to things everyday and don't have to do it in a court of law. We witness the birth of a child. At every wedding the bride and groom must provide witnesses to sign the documents, people who were present to witness the event. Each time we tell a story about something we have seen or experienced we are witnessing to the event. We like to know that we can trust the witness, in other words the person recounting the event, so if we go to retell it ourselves, we know we have the facts straight.

So it is in the Gospel of John that in a brief encounter in the beginning of the gospel we are told about John the baptizer. In this gospel we are not given a lot of detail about the man. We are not given a description, but rather just a witness statement. "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him" (v7). What he testifies to is relevant.

He came as a witness to testify to the light. John the baptizer was a witness of Jesus life. So was each of those who wrote the gospels. They either were first hand witnesses or had gathered the stories of those they believed to have the details, the relevant information for their research of Jesus life, and wrote it down as a testimony, to witness to who Jesus was.

We are coming to a point in our Christian calendar that marks one of our most significant celebrations – Christmas. As the world plays Christmas carols to delight the senses and make buyers buy more, stores are decorated, presents are wrapped and placed under a tree, homes are covered in lights and Christmas decorations inside and out, we tend to miss the point.

Our oldest son didn't take long to get to the point of all the consumerism that has become Christmas when he arrived at our home yesterday. You see our little family has

a fairly modest tradition over the last few years of pulling names and buying one gift to exchange, the cost of which is not to exceed fifty dollars. And yes, this it is pretty challenging to purchase something that someone else will enjoy for \$50.00 and make it meaningful. Even at that our son basically said, this is ridiculous. This buying presents is only about stores making money and people spending for no real reason other than it is Christmas. And though our family is pretty low key, many people go into debt for Christmas. I am pretty sure this was not what God was thinking when a baby was brought into the world.

God had a much bigger project in mind with Jesus. Jesus came to reconcile God, people, and creation to one another. To be reconciled to God means the end of separation. You see when we celebrate Christ's birth, we are celebrating the fact that God sent Jesus not only to be born, but also to face death. Humanity loves celebrating births, new life and all, but we have a hard time with death. Death to us means separation, it means not being able to hold or talk to the one who we loved so dearly. It might mean the end of being able to make things right, but for God, Jesus death meant just the opposite.

In Jesus' death we humans are given new life. In Jesus' death we can finally come close to God in a way that was not possible before Jesus. In Jesus, death was defeated. In Jesus' death we come to the core of our belief that death does not have the final word, life has the final word! Through Jesus' death we have the possibility of living life in a more meaningful and fuller way than ever before. Through Jesus' death we can trust that those we have had to say goodbye to in this life are now living fully in the presence of God. Through Jesus' death we can trust that we will live!

Jesus birth at Christmas, his purpose for being born is directly linked to our Easter joy. We are called an Easter people not a Christmas people for a reason. Though the stickers say, "Jesus is the reason for the season" and that is true of Christmas, it is ours to also remember and celebrate that Christmas marks the beginning of what it means to be a Christian. Christmas Eve and Day do not mark the end of a season but rather the beginning of life, the beginning of everything it means to be followers of Christ.

The world marks the end of the year with Christmas, but we mark only the beginning of our cycle with Easter being our biggest event. We are to mark each day as a celebration of the resurrection of Christ...when death was defeated, and new life begun. We get to lay claim to that new life every moment of every day. When we mess up, we get to begin again and again and again. There is no limit on how many passes we get. Through Christ's birth and death, we get forgiveness over and over and over again.

This is not to say that we should keep doing as we are doing because we can get forgiveness. To be Christian means to strive to become more Christ like each day. It is just that some days we are much better at living that way than other days. Jesus is the light that shines in our darkness. When light shines it exposes everything. When I look through the sunshine streaming into my living room, I can see every speck of dust that

is floating through the air. In the darkness none of that is revealed. So it is with Christ. His light is so bright that when we are looking, we can see just how depraved we are and the world is, but unlike the dust that never seems to disappear, Christ provided a way for us to be cleaned, pure and white as freshly fallen snow.

Through Christ, God no longer sees our inequity, but rather the love that was so deep, so wide, so high, and so broad that Jesus, the Word who was in the beginning with God, came in human form, to redeem us, to reconcile us so that we would not be estranged from God any more. When we celebrate Christmas, we celebrate so much more than the birth of a baby. We celebrate the redemption of the world. We celebrate light and life coming from God.

It is with this joy, this amazing grace, this mystery that we can sing the words penned by Charles Wesley back in the early 1700's of *Hark! The herald angels sing*. This hymn is unapologetically filled with words of reconciliation, of what God through Jesus has accomplished for us and the world. This hymn is about Christ's birth but more so about what Christ accomplished and the reason to rejoice.

In all of this, what is left is for you to make a decision. How are you going to live? Is Christmas the be all and end of your faith? Is Christmas about the wrappings and decorations or is it about Christ, life, and living fully. Is Christmas the end of the year or the beginning of the year?

You may wonder why the questions. We are here, we have shown up for church, obviously we are Christians who believe. The questions come as a challenge and a hope. Each day through Christ we are given the choice to live as we always have or to make each day one more where we live knowing what God did in sending Jesus as a baby in the humblest of places. Which means each day we work to becoming a person choosing to be more Christ-like in our actions, speech, thinking, and in our hearts.

There is reason to celebrate the season, even to decorate houses and exchange presents. This birth was the in-breaking of God into the world, changing the course of human history. It is a story that has pages and pages of witnesses testifying to the work of God. This short passage in the Gospel of John ends with "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" (v14).

This is the hope which we celebrate at Christmas, but it is more than hope, it is grace and truth that we can claim for ourselves, each and every person can claim for themselves. Living as a Christian does not mean all joy and no pain, in fact living our lives in the Spirit of Christmas and of Christ is really hard work and can at times bring more struggle, but the reward is worth it. Life! Life now and always! And we can sing with the cosmos "Hark! The herald angels sing glory to the newborn King!