

## **Christmas 2 Year B 2021**

### **January 3, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We find ourselves once again living in an in-between time. The celebrations of Christmas—Christmas Eve and Christmas Day—are over. Our culture tells us that Christmas began right after Thanksgiving, and it had a nice clean end on December 25<sup>th</sup> when the final crumbs of Christmas dinner were cleared away, or the next day when the tree was hauled out to the curb. We've already moved past Christmas to New Year's Eve, and even that is now over.

To the world, Christmas is over. And yet, the Christmas season actually lasts 12 days until January 6<sup>th</sup>. And so, we find ourselves in-between. We are in between our culture's end of Christmas and the coming of Epiphany. We are in-between commemorating the birth of Jesus, and the time when Jesus is revealed to all people.

The problem is, we don't like living in an in-between time. We just don't do it very well. We like having that nice clean end to Christmas. As we were preparing for the New Year, we were all talking like some magic switch would be flipped once the clock struck 12:01 on New Year's Day, and everything would be different. There were kids that hoped that on New Year's Day we could finally take off our masks and everything would go back to normal. We don't like this in-between time, this time when we know things will change, but they've not yet changed.

Similarly, when my family drove out to Colorado in the summer a few years ago to see my family, as soon as we crossed the state line into Colorado, Ella was pretty bummed out. As we talked to her about it, she said, "Well, I just thought it would be different. I expected it to be all snowy and Christmassy." And even I assumed I'd at least be able to see some mountains on the horizon once we got into Colorado.

But there isn't a magic switch. We can't just instantly make the mountains appear. Colorado isn't some magical dream land with snow and Christmas all the time. And the pandemic won't just go away now that it's 2021. It's a new year, but things have yet to change. We still live in-between, even though it's not always a comfortable place to be. Our culture, and maybe even we ourselves, have an aversion to in-betweenness.

But the problem is that we are still in between. 2020 was a tough year—a year of pain, suffering, uncertainty and loss. The pandemic has been traumatic and stressful for us. And yet, we continue to find ourselves in the midst of the pandemic.

We continue in an in-between time as we wait to receive the vaccination. Joyfully, there are a few people in our congregation that have received their first dose, but it could still be many months before most of us have the opportunity to receive the vaccine. We are also in an in-between time as we wait to see a hopeful recovery of the economy, especially for small business owners, and those that have lost their jobs during this time. There is so much loss. And beyond the pandemic, we also continue an in-between time from now until inauguration day on January 20<sup>th</sup> as we wait to see some kind of end to this election cycle.

So just what do these in-between times mean for us as faithful followers of Christ? I think the words we hear from the Gospel of John today can provide us with direction and great comfort as we seek to live faithfully in between.

John tells us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was 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."

These words that we hear today on this second Sunday of Christmas are really about St. John's understanding of Christmas. You see, John helps us to understand more deeply that Christmas is not only a celebration of a past event. It's not only a celebration of that particular time in history when the Christ child came into our world. Rather, for St. John, the Christmas story is set in the context of creation: "In the beginning, ..." Creation is not just an event of the past, but rather, creation is ongoing,

throughout all time. It is God continuing to give life to God's people. And this is what the Christmas story is all about for John. Christmas is God continuing to give life to God's people, to all of us. Even in the midst of a pandemic, even in this in-between time, God continues to give us life.

“And the word became flesh and lived among us.” These words give us great hope too. Because in these in-between times, we know that God in Christ Jesus continues to dwell with us. And we're called to remember that God will never abandon us. God continues to create life, and love, and hope each and every day.

And in our gospel today we hear that through the Word made flesh, through Jesus, we have all received abundant grace. So, we need not fear in these days ahead, during these in-between times, because Jesus truly is with us.

Therefore, as we reflect on how we are to live in these particular in-between times, it's important for us to remember that ultimately—ultimately—we are always living in in-between times. Those in-between times between the creation of the world, between the saving presence of Jesus coming into our world, that Word being born into our world, and the ultimate reign of God forever. We live in between. And we know that God is continually with us as we move through these times. So then, how are we to live?

The Word becoming flesh and living among us is about how we are called to share the life and message of Christ each and every day in our daily lives, in both certain and uncertain times, and in the in-between times.

Howard Thurman was an American author, philosopher, and theologian, and a civil rights leader of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He died in the 1980s. As we move through these in-between times, I invite us to reflect on Thurman's words in his poem entitled, “The Work of Christmas.” He shares with us his understanding of how we are called to live the life of Jesus. His poem is this:

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among others,  
To make music in the heart.

Let us remember those words, sisters and brothers in Christ. May Jesus the Word of God continue to be born in our hearts each day. May we share Jesus the Word each and every day as we live out the message of Jesus, each and every day in these in-between times. May we seek to find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner, to rebuild the nations, and to bring peace. We will know God as we join in this work. Because God's continuing presence will sustain us and to guide us each and every day. Thanks be to God. Amen.

*This sermon was adapted from Rev. Rosanne Anderson's sermon for the North/West Lower Michigan Synod for January 3, 2021.*