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**WAIT NO MORE**  
**JOHN 1:1-18**  
**A SERMON PREACHED IN DUKE UNIVERSITY CHAPEL**  
**ON SUNDAY, JANUARY 3, 2021**  
**BY THE REV. DR. CAROL GREGG**

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Prayer.

I hope you have received a gift that you treasure, even long after the time it was given. Maybe it is your grandfather's pocket watch even if it no longer keeps time. Maybe it is a family recipe, a bit worn and stained, treasured because it is one of the few items you still have written in your mother's own hand. Maybe the gift is a personal creation.

One day when my son was in elementary school, he came home with a creation. William proudly handed it to me. I looked at this small creation, about the size of my hand, which has two figures on it, one large, one small. They are green lizard-like, four-legged animals, with upward curved tails. The heads feature many eyes and each holds a big smile. Being unable to identify this master creation, I was forced to humbly say, "This is wonderful! Please tell me about it." William happily named it a "scomodo dragon", which is a combination of a Komodo dragon and a scorpion, two animals he found fascinating at the time. Furthermore, he explained, this was a mother-son pair and his signature on the bottom of this artwork said "Happy Mother's Day." This little artistic work is a treasured gift for me and has been on my desk every since he gave it to me many years ago. I am grateful to the teacher who gave and guided the assignment, who probably does not know that the scomodo dragon became a valued gift. Part of what I appreciate about it are the big smiles William created, indicating that for him in those childhood moments, all was right in the world.

In today's gospel reading, John is describing a gift to treasure and savor. Poetically and passionately, he speaks about the incarnation. For those who have waited for the Messiah, for those who have longed to see God, for those who have wanted something more out of life, John declares that we need wait no more. The present reality is that in Jesus born in Bethlehem the Word became flesh and lived among us. This is God's greatest gift and the evangelist practically begs us to know, accept, and hold this transformative reality.

The gospel of Mark begins with Jesus as an adult, at the time of his baptism by John the Baptist. Matthew and Luke begin their narratives of Jesus earlier, with Mary's pregnancy. The gospel of John goes back even earlier, much, much earlier, to the beginning of time. According to John, the Word, which becomes flesh as Jesus is present at the start of everything. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) Jesus was present with God at the beginning of time and part of the creation of all things. The book of John opens the same way the book of Genesis opens, with the phrase "In the beginning". The author is letting us know that just as Jesus was instrumental in the creation of the world, so Jesus is key in the new creation that is now revealed.

By starting the story of Jesus in union with God at the beginning of time, we immediately see the cosmic nature of the "sweet little Jesus boy" laid in a manger. Jesus is part of the Godhead, part of the Trinity, completely united with the Father and the Spirit, and always was and always will be. The "Word" which is the language John uses has been thought of as God's essence, God's reason, or God in action creating, revealing, and redeeming. This is so much more than just speech. This introduction to Jesus points us to the majestic, holy, eternal nature of God. As grand and as wonderful as you can imagine, that is where John wants to take us. As wonderful as life and light itself.

Instead of speaking of the angel's announcement, a manger, and shepherds, John describes the birth of Jesus writing "The Word became flesh and lived among us." (John 1:14) In other words the holy, creating, redeeming, majestic essence of God became flesh in the person of Jesus. God who cannot be limited by time and

space, chose to be constrained by earthly realities, in order to reveal the Divine. “No one has ever seen God... [it is Jesus] who has made God known.” (John 1:18)

The Word became flesh -- astounding, miraculous, wonderful. And there is more.

When the Word became flesh in Jesus, what is revealed is “full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14b) And “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” (John 1:16) Even before his ministry of teaching and healing, even before his death and resurrection, already John is pointing us to an abundance of grace. The repetition of grace upon grace points to a fullness, an inexhaustible supply, and a plenitude of divine mercy we can hardly imagine.<sup>1</sup>

Paul in his letter to the church at Ephesus echoes this abundance as he opens the letter. He writes of “glorious grace” and the “riches of grace” that God “lavished on us.” (Ephesians 1:6,7,8) It is as if there are not enough ways to speak of this gift of incarnation. To the Philippians, Paul speaks about “emptying”, but here in Ephesians and certainly in the gospel of John, it is all about fullness and abundance.<sup>2</sup>

And there is still more good news.

John tells us that those who see Jesus, who recognize God’s revelation in the baby born in Bethlehem, will be given the “power to become children of God.” (John 1:12) We are given the power. At other points in scripture, we learn that we may “receive a spirit of adoption” or “wait for adoption.” (Romans 8, 15, 23) Certainly, the language of adoption as a gift we receive makes good sense, but I am struck by the fact that in John, we are empowered to become children of God. Here we have an active role, claiming a new identity as daughters and sons of God. The door is open. God’s will is revealed. It is grace, fullness, light, and life.

John is completely transparent about his goal in writing. Near the end of the gospel, we read:

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:30-31)

Here is the good news. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and we may have life in his name.

This is where we need to stop for today. We need to pause right here and savor this gift. The Word made flesh. Grace upon grace. Children of God. What our hearts most desire, God’s own presence, is ours now. We don’t need to wait any longer. God is here. God is with us. Can we pause long enough to truly savor this gift?

Perhaps many of us have minds that are always racing ahead to tomorrow. I maintain several to-do lists, so I am well aware of what is not done. We know there is work to do. Howard Thurman penned a beautiful piece on the “Work of Christmas.” He wrote:

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 flocks,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost,  
to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry,

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<sup>1</sup> *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: John*

<sup>2</sup> *Women's Bible Commentary*, Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, editors. P. 712

to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among the people,  
to make music in the heart.

We know Thurman is right and there is much to do. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ means that we are each called to acts of love, service, and justice. And yet, the song of the angels is not yet stilled. We have some last Christmas carols to sing today. The season of Christmas is short, only 12 days, and today is the 10th day of Christmas, so for today perhaps we can pause for just one moment more to savor the gift of the incarnation.

If you have ever been hiking, then you may know a time in which you rounded a bend or crested a hill, and came across a beautiful view. Whether or not you had seen it before, you stopped in your tracks to take in the sight. Maybe it was a lovely still lake, with reflections to notice and birds gliding above. Maybe it was a mountain vista high enough that you could see for miles, including the mountains and valleys below. Of course, you stop to admire the view for a while.

When I do this, it is not long before my mind gets working again. How many more miles is there in this trail? I am sitting too long? Will my legs get stiff? Are my hiking companions ready to go? Maybe a poem comes to mind.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.<sup>3</sup>

There are miles to go, yet today I invite us to set-a-spell to take in the beauty and wonder that is before us. What we have waited for and longed for is right here. There is no need to rush off just yet. In fact, there is reason to stay.

We are poised to enter a New Year, full of promise and challenge, joy and sorrow, unlike anything other year we have known, and similar to every year we have lived. The ups and downs of the year to come have the potential to toss us to and fro as we get caught in drama or overwhelmed by challenge or complacent in comfort. In this New Year, we cannot and will not ignore the needs of others such as that caused by a bombing in Nashville or overcrowded hospitals in Los Angeles. But before we rush into the year ahead, the gospel of John seems to invite us to pause in the face of a profound mystery and to savor the gift of the Word made flesh.

We stop here, in part precisely because we can. The waiting is over. The search for meaning is complete. We no longer need to rush from one idea to another, or one activity to another in order to find purpose. We no longer need to seek significance or value. Restlessness can be a thing of the past. In Jesus, God has come to dwell among us and empowers us to become children of God. As one commentary puts it, this is “the decisive event in human history...The incarnation means that human beings can see, hear, and know God in ways never before possible.”<sup>4</sup> The waiting for revelation is over. God is here.

Pausing here, savoring the incarnation helps ground us in God’s truth. Knowing God’s presence with us, trusting the grace and truth we find in Jesus, provides us a firm foundation. It is our anchor in the ups and downs in life. This God-with-us is our strength and guide. Without the abundance of grace that God gives us, we cannot sustain a life of serving, loving, and giving. Unless we are planted here, we will bear no fruit. Later in this gospel, when Jesus was an adult, he said, “Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must

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<sup>3</sup> From “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” by Robert Frost

<sup>4</sup> *New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: John*

remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me...As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.” (John 15:4, 9) Remain right here in the mystery of Divine love made flesh in Jesus.

As we remain with this mystery, perhaps we will be like one of the first disciples. At the end of the gospel, John tells the story of Thomas, known as the doubter, who proclaimed deep faith with the words, “My Lord and My God.” (John 20:28) He knew that in seeing Jesus, he was also seeing God.

Wait no more. Jesus is here. God is with us. Thanks be to God.

Alleluia. Amen.