St. Matthew's Lutheran Church & School – Oconomowoc, WI
Christmas Day – Year A
John 1:1-14
December 25, 2025

Sermon: John 1:1-14
Through the Child We Become a child

Christmas is ripe with traditions. Perhaps one of your favorite traditions was yesterday in worship as we joined our voices singing "Silent Night, Holy Night" with the warm glow of the candlelight filling the church. If you didn't have that maybe it just wouldn't feel right. Perhaps you have a family tradition of going over to a relative's house or everyone comes to your house this year and you gather around for the big meal and holiday cheer and to tell stories about eight tiny reindeer. Maybe those are part of your traditions for Christmas, maybe not. Have you ever been part of one of these Christmas traditions that are so popular: the gift exchange? If you know the exact thing that the person will love to receive then you are excited and can't wait to get the gift for them, give it to them, and see the look on their face when they open it because you are sure that Uncle Ted is going to love his new geothermal hunting socks complete with the stocking stuffer toe warmers. Maybe you dread the gift exchange. Maybe it causes you anxiety that you can't get over especially if you are trying to buy for someone that you don't know that well. You are not sure what their interests are and what they would like and enjoy from you or when they open it are they going to give you one of those fake, "Great! I love it. It's what I always wanted! How did you know. This was just what I needed. How did you know that I needed a new nose hair trimmer?" Gift exchanges can sometimes be a hit and sometimes they can be a big swing and a miss. Then you think to yourself, "I knew I should have just gotten them a gift card to Kwik Trip. Who doesn't love a gift card to Kwik Trip if you live in Wisconsin?" Sometimes gift exchanges work out and sometimes they don't.

There are many things exchanged in the Christmas season. It can be gifts in an exchange at work or with extended family members. It can be decorations as the normal décor that adorns the halls and walls of home are exchanged for the reds and greens, lights, and trees. However, brothers and sisters if that is the focus of our Christmas then we may as well not even bother going through all the fuss. Let's ponder a much deeper exchange that is wrapped in something far more important than red and green wrapping paper and placed under a tree. Let's ponder what this exchange means for us a bit longer than Black Friday to December 26th.

The minutia was set in motion the moment words were delivered. He was the most powerful man in the world, and he gave the decree to count the people he ruled so that he could tax them. When Caesar Augustus speaks the world moves. He wanted to flex his muscle and gather taxes for the treasury. Little did he know, he who thought he was so powerful and mighty over the entire world, was just a pawn used by God to fulfill a promise for all eternity for all mankind. So, at the command of Caesar a very pregnant Virgin and her fiancé make the 80-mile trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill the promise made 500 years prior that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem.

So, in a manger that the livestock were feeding from a day earlier, maybe even less than that, the Savior is born, wrapped in cloths, and placed there to sleep on the hay. John explains the unexplainable and what was exchanged in that moment and for whom and why. It's an exchange we can't grasp rationally, but only through faith. What was the exchange that took place? "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).* At the beginning of our lesson it explains more about the Word made flesh. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:1-4).* The Creator of all exchanged his throne in heaven for a manger with the animals. The Creator enters creation. The hands that placed the stars and fixed them in the sky are the now the hands that reach out for Mary's loving touch. The hands that placed the boundaries of the ocean and said no further, reach out to grasp her fingers. The breath that breathed life into Adam on the sixth day of creation now takes the small, simple breaths of a newborn. The God that sustains life and opens his hand and satisfies the desires of all living things is now dependent upon his earthly mother Mary to sustain him and meet his needs. He exchanged perfection in heaven to live and move and walk among the imperfection of this world.

The exchange is so powerful and is nearly beyond words. He walked and moved among us human beings on earth. He moved from heaven to earth, from deity to humanity, to the womb of a Virgin to be born and placed in a manger. He didn't come so that we can gaze at how cute his chubby newborn cheeks are in the manger. He came to move from the manger to the cross, from the cross to death, from the bonds of death the victory of the resurrection and the empty tomb.

Have you ever pondered how short the Bible would be if Adam and Eve never sinned? It would basically be this: God created the world in six days and gave mankind special focus as the crown of his creation, he placed

them in paradise in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve fulfilled God's command to fill the earth and subdue it and they would live and enjoy perfect communication and harmony with God and he would dwell with him. The end. It would be really short if Adam and Eve never fell into sin. There would be no need for Christmas, no need for Easter. Have you ever pondered that the Bible still could have been really short even after Adam and Eve fell into sin and disobeyed God? It could have been: God created the world in six days and gave mankind special focus as the crown of his creation, he placed them in paradise in the Garden of Eden, they sinned against him by eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and God sent them to punishment in hell with Satan for their disobedience, the end. That would have been perfectly just, and we would be lost for eternity.

Instead, God tells us this, *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).* Instead, of you and me being lost for eternity God comes to us in grace and truth. Our God is not a God that gives us grace, love, and truth from a distance. He is not a stand-off, hands-off God. He came down here on earth because we could not rise to him. He is a God that took on human flesh and blood. He is a God that walked on this earth and reached out to the sick and healed them. He spread mud on a blind man's eyes and gave sight. People pressed him from all sides, and he healed them. He fed the hungry. He reached out to heal the lepers, something that no one else would ever dream of doing. There is our God, there is Jesus in the middle of the mess of this sinful world to bring deliverance and healing to our biggest problem. He was on a mission that took him the cross and in three and a half months we will focus on that, but that mission starts today with the Word made flesh and made his dwelling among us. That is what today is about. It is not about lights and trees. It is about our God that came to take away our sin so that another exchange would take place.

The exchange of the rags of our sin for the riches of his kingdom. It is all done by him so that we can become children of God and belong to him. *"To those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12, 13).* Maybe you don't have anyone to exchange a gift with this Christmas. Maybe there isn't a gift with your name on it under the tree and it's difficult for you. Maybe you no longer have that person to give a gift to. But there is an exchange indeed! Through the Child born in Bethlehem and placed in a manger we become a child of God. It does not happen apart from Christ. It does not happen apart from God coming to us. It does not happen apart from God taking our place, our punishment, our death. That is why we have such joy that, "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."* Amen.