

+ John 1:1-14 + The Big Arrival Has Come! + Christmas Day + 25 December 2009 +

Christmas has finally arrived...and so have the presents. There are presents everywhere—big ones, little ones, well-wrapped ones, badly wrapped ones, round ones, square ones, heavy ones, light ones, so many you almost think that Christmas is all about the presents.

Have you finally had the chance to open up those presents from your loved ones? Did you get what you wanted? Did you get something out of the ordinary? Any special presents arrive under your Christmas tree or at your door or did you get the same gift of a tie or socks or a kitchen gadget you seem to get every year? Has Christmas even been a little disappointing because you didn't get what you wanted? With all the focus on what you get, you have to wonder if Christmas really is all about the presents.

Actually Christmas is all about the arrival of one special, extraordinary gift. People waited for centuries for this gift to arrive specially wrapped by God himself. We've prepared for the arrival of this gift these past four weeks of Advent, but today the Apostle John helps us realize that **THE BIG ARRIVAL** of God's extraordinary Christmas gift **HAS COME!**

There are times when you and I receive gifts that make us ask, "What is it?" The extraordinary gift that our God has placed before us is no ordinary gift and needs some explanation. John begins, ***"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 men."*** It all started in the Garden of Eden. Our first parents Adam and Eve had a perfect relationship with God. They spent personal time with God. He was their perfect Creator. They were his perfect creation. He provided everything they needed and more, but he gave one command: Don't eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil!

Sadly Adam and Eve disobeyed that one command and destroyed their perfect relationship with God. They gave in to temptation and ate from the tree. They deserved the punishment of physical and eternal death. They would now suffer the effects of sin for the rest of their lives, which would end in death. Sin would pass from them to every generation that followed, but out of amazing love, God promised a Savior, who would come to deliver them and all their descendants from sin and death. ***"I will put enmity between you (Satan) and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."***

As generations and centuries passed, the need for a Savior became more desperate as sin infected every part of God's creation, but God never forgot his promise. He continued to remind his people to be ready for the big arrival of their Savior. To Abraham he promised, ***"All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*** To David he promised, ***"Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."*** Through Jeremiah the prophet he promised, ***"In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness."***

God wasn't about to let his people down, so when the time had fully come, he prepared the greatest gift of all—his only begotten Son, God himself. ***"The Word was God."*** No ordinary man could save mankind from the terrible, death-ridden corruption of sin. Man's attempts to save himself always fail. No effort, no sacrifice, no work could save us, but ***"God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son."*** Only one who was God himself could perfectly obey every command contained in God's holy Law. Only one who was God himself could take the bill of the impossible debt of sin that mankind had rung up and mark it "Paid in Full" for all eternity. Only one who was God himself could offer himself in our place as the sacrifice for sin and reconcile us once and for all with the holy God.

When you try to find that perfect gift for a special loved one, you put more effort into it, so you get exactly what you want to give them. As much as you love them, though, you probably won't give up everything you have to get that gift for them. You and I are more likely to settle for a good gift we are willing to give than the absolutely best gift we are able to give. When God looked at our desperate condition, though, he didn't just settle for a good gift. No, he gave up everything to give what you needed most—a Savior, but God didn't just snap his fingers and salvation happened. He didn't speak into the darkness, "Let there be salvation for all mankind," and it was. No, ***"the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."***

The only way God could fully rescue us from the death grip of Satan was to take on our human flesh. Jesus, the very Son of God himself, had to become fully human so he could save every human. He had to leave the

glories of heaven to live in this corrupt and dying world. He started out in such a humble way. He was born in a filthy stable and laid in a manger from which cattle and sheep ate. He was born to parents who were not only poor, but whose reputations were questioned because of Mary's pre-marital pregnancy. As he grew up, he probably faced teasing and peer pressure. All his life, he faced the same temptations – ***"I can give you all this... if you bow down to me."*** He felt the same exhaustion, the same pangs of hunger and thirst, the same pain, the same sorrow. He suffered the same rejection from the unbelieving world. ***"He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."***

Not once, though, did our Savior ever throw up his hands and say, "Forget it! You don't deserve to have me here if my own people treat me this way!" No, as Isaiah prophesied 700 years before, ***"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."*** He lived the perfect life of obedience that you and I could not. He didn't give in to the temptations of earthly success and glory and pride in place of his Father's plan for our salvation. He didn't let the rejection of the world stop him from putting himself in our place. No, as Isaiah tells us, ***"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed."*** Jesus had to arrive as true God and true man.

That's why we celebrate the Big Arrival today. After weeks of Advent watchfulness and waiting, repentant preparation, and growing joy, we celebrate the Word made flesh for you. We gather around the manger of our Savior-King and let the miracle there take our breath away again at how ordinary and extraordinary it all is. ***"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us..."*** We marvel at the love that moved God himself to take on our human flesh to be our Substitute, all while keeping his divinity.

As you peer into that manger and marvel at the miracle, lift your gaze to see the shadow of the cross stretching out behind that lowly manger-bed. This child, this Savior comes for one and only one purpose—to make his way to that cross to suffer and die for you and for your sins. Let that miracle, that extraordinary Christmas gift take your breath away as you see the grace of God in the flesh there in the manger, on the dusty roads of Palestine, on the cross of Calvary, and in the empty tomb of Easter, all for you. ***"Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord."***

What is Christmas really all about? Not the presents, but the big arrival of God's extraordinary, amazing, breathtaking gift—Christ Jesus our Lord. The Big Arrival has come. In his grace, that same Christ still comes to us through Word and water and bread and wine. That same Christ will also come again one day in glory, not lowliness, to bring you to be with him in heaven. So, then, like those who saw the Christ-Child that first Christmas, may the Lord enable you to joyfully proclaim the wonderful news that the Savior has arrived. ***"We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."*** Amen.