

**St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church
Modesto, California
The Nativity of Our Lord
Christmas Eve**

Sermon by Pastor Jonathan Micheel

A Word for the World

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

God is quiet. Very quiet. So it would seem most of the time. That can be frustrating. “God spoke with Moses face to face. What’s Moses got that I haven’t got? God sent angels to announce Christ’s birth to shepherds. Couldn’t he send an angel to talk to me? I wouldn’t mind an angel delivering a message to me once in a while. I wouldn’t even need ‘a whole company of the heavenly host.’ I’d take just one angel—a little one would be fine.” God could speak to us directly and majestically, but he doesn’t. God is quiet. Very quiet.

We even get mad at him for not speaking. Just over a year ago, many people were wondering where God was and why he wasn’t more visible. Why wasn’t God saying anything about the atrocities that had happened in our country? Why was God quiet? Something so momentous—surely God must have something to say about it. Why was God not making a pronouncement, not rendering an official opinion? Everyone else in the world seemed to have an opinion. Why not God?

Of course, it’s strange that people would be mad at God for not talking to them. We people of this world are very good at ignoring God or drowning out his voice with noise that’s more to our liking. After trying to marginalize God and push him away, it’s pretty audacious to shake our fingers at him for not saying something.

God is quiet. Very quiet. That can make us wonder if he notices us at all, and our wondering can get desperate at times. Wouldn’t it be nice if God spoke up a little louder—if once in a while he did send an angel, or a whole bunch of them, to talk to us, to say something, to deliver a message? Wouldn’t it be nice if God would send just a word or two our way so that we would know what he was thinking, so that we would know if he noticed us, so we would know if he was at all concerned about us, so we could know if he loved us?

God is quiet. Christmas is a time, however, to celebrate the fact that God does speak. God does talk to us. God does have a word for the world everyone in it; that means God has a word to say to you and to me.

This Word, which is a message in and of itself, comes in an unusual way. It doesn't come via the U.S. Postal service, as our Christmas cards do. It doesn't come by UPS or FedEx, as do gifts ordered online. It doesn't come through cyberspace like an email. This Word comes in human flesh and blood.

This Word, you see, is a person, a real human like you and me. He's a person who is himself a message from God to the world. He's a person, in fact, who actually is God coming to the world. One of the names by which he's known is "God-with-us". We know him by another name: Jesus. Jesus coming into human flesh and blood, being conceived, being born—all this is God speaking to us. That's why John calls Jesus "the Word" of God. We use words to communicate. Jesus' coming in flesh is God communicating with us.

What's he saying to us? By sending his only Son into human flesh, God our Father is saying a number of things. He's saying, "I notice you. I notice that you have problems. I notice that you feel pain of many different kinds. I notice that you feel weak sometimes, pushed around. Sometimes you feel wounded, sometimes abandoned, sometimes alone. And sometimes guilty. I know the source of your problems: it's the other people in the world and it's you yourself. The sins that other people do to each other and to you, they bring pain. And the sins that you do bring guilt to yourself and alienation with me. I see how everything mounts up and threatens to crush you.

"But," says our God, "I want you to know that I notice you, and I love you. That's why I'm sending my Son to the falling-apart world you live in. I don't want you to pay for your sins against me. So I'm sending my Son to pay your debt for you. He will absorb your guilt in his own body and pays its appalling price in full. I don't want you to be crushed by the evil that's all around you. So I'm sending my Son to rescue you from it. I don't want you to be engulfed by darkness. So I'm sending my Son to bring you light. I don't want you to die, so I'm sending my Son to freely give you life, life to the full. This life is yours now, and it will be yours to keep forever. You will still hurt. You will still carry crosses and suffer. But you will live."

This is how God speaks to us. He sends a baby. He sends his very best, his one and only begotten Son. Not by mail, but in the flesh. The sender? God our Father. The recipients? The people of the world, including you and me. The packaging? Human flesh and blood.

The content of the message? As John says, it's full of "grace and truth." Grace is that special word the Bible uses to denote the love God has for us. It's a love that's inexplicable. We human beings have not exactly impressed God so deeply

that he just can't resist doing nice things for us. Hardly. Rather what we have earned from God is a message of doom and destruction. Instead, God gives us love. He promises, through the flesh and blood of his Son, to ransom us, to love us and to save us.

Now, this may not be the message that we want to hear. From our perspective, there are many more important things to think about than sin and forgiveness, guilt and redemption. Each of us could quickly come up with a list of pressing problems in our world and in our individual lives. But this message from God, this Word to the world—the thing about it is, it's the truth. It's real. It's meaningful. The problems God identifies—like our alienation from him because of our sins, like the darkness of death—these are real problems. And Jesus is the real solution.

On this quiet night, listen. God is speaking. God is sending a message. God does have a Word for the world, and for you personally. This Word is Jesus.

Listen, won't you? And live.

Amen.