

Christmas Invites Us To Believe

☆ **In the eternal God (vv.1-5)**

☆ **In our Brother (vv.6-13)**

☆ **In our Savior (v.14)**

In the name of Jesus, our newborn Savior, dear celebrating Christians:

There's a secular Christmas song with a line I couldn't understand as a kid. Remember "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas"? It says toward the end, "And Mom and Dad can hardly wait for school to start again...." Why? I'm thankful my parents never made us feel that way.

Yet there is something universal to families that get together once a year. Listen long enough and it seems every family has at least one thing in common: maybe even a couple "crazies." You know what I mean? Relatives so different they might be adopted? Most of us don't stop to think that if they seem so strange to us, what do we seem like to them? Maybe we're the crazy ones and just don't know it.

Could that be behind a bit of the sadness of Christmas? Families are fragmented with painful memories because we can't see people as they really are? Many get married in hopes of changing their future spouse, when we all need God to change us into lovers and friends more like Him. We need to love God for who He is. **Christmas Invites Us To Believe** in One who will never disappoint. **Believe...**

☆ **In the eternal God (vv.1-5)**

Sometimes the best Christians slide into spiritual ruts. You feel as if you're cruising the freeway of faith, then suddenly you're lurching like a wagon behind a pair of oxen. Well, maybe not oxen, but at least a very bumpy ride in an old pickup truck. You try to "ride the ridges" as my Montana rancher friends called it, but the tires keep slipping. You questioning God like Job, but with far less excuse. You're asking of God: "What has He done for me lately?" And you don't even realize what's wrong.

That's why I'm so grateful for Christian holidays like Christmas. They shine across the cold winter landscape of our lives like friendly lights in blinding snowstorm. I don't have to figure it all out. God is glad to look down deep inside my soul where doctors cannot see. God identifies one of my major spiritual problems in these first two verses. These ruts steer us away from what God *is* to what God *does*. Don't over think this. If you love God only for what He *does* for you, it's not much more than a Hollywood romance: "As long as the heat is on, great! But stop making me feel good and...whoa, Baby! This is war!" In spiritual terms do you love your salvation more than your Savior? Created things more than your Creator? Do you love what God *does* for you rather than loving God for who He *is*?

Look who He is! "***In the beginning was the Word...***" ***The Word*** was projecting God's thoughts and feelings before any ears were around to hear. ***The Word*** is the extension of God's heart, His mind, His power. "***...and the Word was with God...***" This doesn't mean "with" as when you ride the elevator "with" strangers. It's more than eating Christmas dinner "with" family. This is "with" like your face turns toward your favorite aunt or uncle, or the grandchild you love to see. There's a warmth here that comes from the unity of the essence of ***the Word "with God"*** because "***...the Word was God.***" The greatest human minds have all denied it. They crucified Him for saying. But "***the Word***" still stands as God because "***He was with God in the beginning.***" It's not crazy to say so when it's true.

All the world's religions line up against this. Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons will come knocking and maybe even say he's a god now, but not admit what this is saying that ***the Word*** is God from all eternity. Here' why we believe this. ***The Word*** says, "***Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.***" Who was here first is not too hard to figure out.

You don't need to be an engineer or builder. If I stand next to the pulpit and say, "I made this," which was here first, me or the pulpit? But we don't "make" things the same way **God the Word** did. **In the beginning** there was nothing until "**He spoke and it came to be.**" (Psalm 33:9) When this pulpit came damaged in shipment, I could not say, "Pulpit be repaired." I had to get an estimate from the freight company, get out my clamps and glue, then send them a bill – below their lowest estimate. That settlement replaced my second pair of shoes worn out in our neighborhoods. But guess what happened when **the Word** came from God's mouth, "**Let there be light.**" Little children know: "**There was light!**"

"In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." "What is life?" Dr. Becker told us at Seminary, "**Life is the enjoyment of God's blessings.**" Rich people without "**life**" cannot enjoy God's blessings now or ever. The "**light**" helps us see God's love for lost sinners. Seeing God on your side, the darkness disappears. Darkness like Judas listened to **the Word** with the other disciples for three years, but could not understand and figured **the Word** was worth less than thirty pieces of silver. Judas who died by his own hand. **The Word** died and rose again to live on as **The eternal God**. He shines where **Christmas Invites Us To Believe...**

✧ **In our Brother (vv.6-13)**

What if you had a relative who needed an advance team for homecoming? Strange? Maybe not so far away in Stillwater a certain Minnesota woman needs security to check things out this Christmas. Don't all the presidential candidates have a Secret Service detail?

Should this surprise us? When **the Word** came into this world, He sent an advance team to prepare people's hearts where He was coming to shine the light of God's truth and grace. "John the Baptist," we call him. It had been so long since a prophet appeared in Israel, many souls were sound asleep. You know what it's like on a dark night when you can't seem to open your eyes. If your brother shines a flashlight on you, you're blinded. But if he holds his hand over the lens to give you a little reflection, your eyes adjust. John the Baptist shone the light on **the Word** for all to know He was coming.

Even His biological brothers thought he was a crazy relative making a name for himself. They gave advice on how He could do a better job promoting Himself. They missed how we can love Him just for who He is. He came determined in spite of rejection from relatives to help you **Believe – In our Brother**. Not by biology, but by Baptism we are "**but born of God,**" closer than Christmas family.

✧ **In our Savior (v.14)**

Love who He is! "**The Word became flesh**" so we see Him and touch Him. God came not to look at us and shake His head in pity. He came "**to live with us,**" to be one with us in a glorious way. He does not treat us like the teenage boy following famous George Burns after he sang, "I Wish I Were Eighteen Again." The poor kid kept trying to shake the 94-year-old's hand, but the video clip ended with him practically ignored. "**The Word became flesh**" to reveal something about God's "**glory.**"

Some of you will remember our Children's Christmas service a few years ago when we set up a manger scene with a tent over it right here in the altar area. On the left was the Hebrew word *Shakan*; on the right the Greek word *skēnō*. A year later the children still knew what those words meant. The point of their program was that God came to dwell with us. But here in the last word of our text the Greek original echoes the Hebrew of the Old Testament. God literally came "to tent" with His people. The Feast of the Tabernacles every year in the Fall was for all the Israelites to enjoy a national campout. No working, just camping in God's presence and enjoying fellowship with God and each other. In Jesus' Revelation to John He says, "**They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.**" (7:15 NIV84) Because **the Word** is "**full of grace and truth,**" the unworthy and unlovable like us, can look forward to eternal Christmas with God. **Christmas Invites Us To Believe – In our Savior**. You're not crazy. God wants you to be certain you will go to heaven. **Believe – In our Savior**, in *your* Savior forever and ever. Amen.