

Christmas 2, 1.2.2022

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Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18

“In him you also”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*

A blessed New Year to you all. Yesterday was New Year’s Day and the start of another new calendar year. New Year’s Day is an auspicious day. Over a lifetime, we only get a limited number of these first days. How did you spend this first day of the New Year? On the church calendar, New Year’s Day is always the commemoration of the holy Name of Jesus, reminding us to begin the New Year in Jesus’ name.

At this moment every year, we have the opportunity to recommit living our lives in the name of Jesus Christ. John’s gospel today reads: *“No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.”* Jesus makes God known. Only in Jesus do we meet and know the beginning and the goal of all time, history and eternity. Beginning the New Year should cause us to ask, “In whose name will I seek to live each and every day?”

So at the beginning of a New Year, I invite you to recommit your life and all of your priorities to the holy Name of Jesus. Call upon his name, for it is salvation; look to his name, for it gives direction; live in his name, for he is life and light. Let Jesus’ name take root ever more deeply in your life, so that your life may be ever more deeply rooted in him.

The first chapter of John’s gospel is traditionally a text we read during this season, because it tells us who Jesus is and why he is born at Christmas. Jesus is the Word made flesh among us. Jesus is the Word who was in the beginning, who was with God and who is God. All things were created through the Word, and without the Word nothing has been created. This means that each of us, you and me, have been created to know God. The words of John 1:14 say it all, *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory...full of grace and truth.”*

The beginning of a New Year is a good time to think about the meaning and direction of our lives. Yet no matter how much we would like to accentuate the positive, our lives have been sorely challenged during the last year. 2021 was by any account a year that most of us would like to leave behind. It was a year of an ongoing pandemic, of a disease that has killed nearly 5.5 million people globally, and nearly 825,000 people in this nation alone.

Last year was also one of the most divisive and rancorous years in recent memory. Though we may know the good we should do, as human beings, we have instead fought and sparred with one

another instead of helping one another. Yet John's gospel tells us that "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*" The name of Jesus is light that our human darkness and sin can never overcome. Today as we stand before a New Year, we hear the good news is that no matter what the year might bring, the presence of Jesus will be light in the darkness and hope for the future.

John goes on to say, "*The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*" These remarkable words tell us that Jesus is a very special kind of light; he enlightens us, meaning that he dwells within us, offering the light of God's grace from within. With Jesus, the Creator of the universe dwells within us. Our challenge is to recognize the light and grace of the Word, Jesus Christ, and follow him outward into service to our neighbor.

There has been much ado about the recent rebranding of Facebook with the name "Meta" and the idea that, via technology, consumers can "live" within a virtual "metaverse." Yet in comparison to John's words about the Logos, the rebranding of a corporation strikes me as a bit of a "tempest in teacup," as corporations and their logos constantly undergo change and modification. Our English word "logo," as in corporate logo, of course comes from the Greek word "logos" which means "word." So we might say that "the Logos" of John's gospel is really the original "logo" or "brand," so to speak, of the universe. Each of us comes already with the Logos dwelling in us. Each of us already belongs to the original "metaverse," the cosmos created by the Word, the Creator God.

You will never need a VR headset or any soon to be obsolete devices or hardware to access the eternity of God's kingdom, because it already exists inside of each of us. Each of us has a universe inside of us - a universe created by the Logos that is unchanging yet truly infinite.

Why do we spend so much time and money seeking to escape the reality of the everyday? If nothing else, John's gospel about "the Word" becoming flesh and dwelling among us should tell us that the everyday, the world of births and deaths, the world of sickness and challenge, the world of joys and thanksgivings - this world - is precisely the place that God wishes to dwell.

Yet we do our best to distract ourselves from the real reality of Immanuel, God with us. We tell ourselves that a newer computer or a faster device will help us live fuller and more efficient lives. Yet we rarely turn off our technology long enough to discover the universe that already exists within us through the incarnate Word, Jesus, who calls us outward to serve our neighbor. Christmas is a reminder that this world of births and deaths is precisely where God dwells, seeking humanity's help in building the very real kingdom of God with love and compassion for others.

Life is not about what we can buy or consume, life is about who we can become in the name of Jesus, by living for others. As long as we think we need to buy or consume something to become more alive, we haven't really discovered the power of living in the name of Jesus.

Today, on the first Sunday of a New Year, we have the opportunity to grasp once again the deepest aspect of our humanity: through Jesus, the living Word of God, we already have the universe of God's eternity within us. Paul writes about this in the reading from Ephesians, "*In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth...and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.*"

Paul's words, "*In him you also*" remind us that *in Jesus* we also have access to the grace of the Holy Spirit. On the first Sunday of the New Year the words, "*In him you also*" encourage us to live each day *in him so that we also* might be light for others in the darkness of this world.

I have told this story at many times and in many places because it is a good story. When I was in high school I often visited the home of a friend. Each time I climbed the stairs to the third floor where he and his brothers' rooms were, I passed a painting of Jesus at the very top of the stairway. Taped to the bottom of the frame was a handwritten note with two words - "The Difference." Of course, these words mean that Jesus is the difference in our lives. One day I asked my friend about this picture of Jesus. My friend said, "Oh, my dad put that up." I have never forgotten that painting and my friend's father who knew that in Jesus, "*in him you also*" will have the difference between light and darkness, life and death.

On this first Sunday of 2022, I would like to ask, "What is the difference in your life, the difference between love and hate, between hope and despair? What is the difference between light and darkness, between chaos and purpose? When Paul writes "*In him you also*" he means Jesus will be the difference in your life between light and darkness, and life and death.

As you receive the bread and cup in the Eucharist today, think about those words, "*Given for you*" - "for you," means that "*in him you also*" have life. As you receive the cup dwell on Paul's words to the Ephesians, "*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace.*" In him, the universe of God's grace dwells within you.

The name of Jesus is the difference for *you also*. Live this year in him, and in his name. *In him you also* can be the light that no darkness can overcome.

The good news of Christmas is, "*In him, you also.*" Amen.