

Sermon preached on 12/28/2014 by Pastor Brahm Semmler Smith
“Hope in the Flesh” based on John 1:1-14

Sisters and brother in Christ, grace and peace be with you all on this 4th day of Christmas!

From its earliest days the Christian Church has been a singing community. And especially around the big days of the Christian calendar, we gather to sing. So many hymns and songs have been penned to celebrate the birth of Christ, and that is what we do today as we gather to worship. We sing some wonderful, beloved hymns, and we read the story of God’s coming into our world in the form of Jesus Christ. Readings and hymns that are familiar, ones that we recognize from our yearly celebration of Christ’s birth.

But we also read the beginning of John’s Gospel this morning, and John has a different kind of Christmas story. Matthew and Luke are more familiar. We can see those stories, visualize those stories and imagine those stories such as Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, the baby in the manger, the sheep and the shepherds, the angels and angel’s choirs, the three wise men and their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. There have been thousands of paintings over the centuries that depict the Christmas story of Matthew and Luke.

But how do you visualize John? How many visual images, paintings, drawings, and such, do you know that embody John’s Christmas Story? We can find thousands of images of the nativity from Matthew and Luke’s perspective, but John’s is different.

John’s Christmas story is abstract and philosophical, a poem to begin this cosmic Gospel. I smile when I think of the differences in this story compared to the accounts of Jesus birth if Matthew or Luke. Can you imagine doing a Christmas pageant based on the beginning of John? In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. It would be abstract. Otherworldly. New Age. With a soundtrack not so much as carols with the organ and piano, but something that would sound like it would fit on a Manheim Steamroller album. Maybe this pageant would feature mimes and interpretive dance instead of shepherds, wisemen, a stable and straw.

John’s gospel is different. But it is not any less important.

In the first five verses, the gospel writer references ‘the Word’ over five times, and the name of Jesus never comes up. And what do we learn about the Word?

The Word is flesh. The Word is full of grace and truth. The Word is full of Glory. The Word is the true light. John says the Word is a light that enlightens everyone it touches.

And all these things tell us this: that our God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, has arrived. God, who is so difficult, even impossible, to explain and capture in the images and words of this world, has come to earth through the form of the Word. The Word, who in going back to the beginning of Genesis, is with God during the creation of the world. The Word, who will be with God until the end of time. The Word, who John acknowledges, is God.

And the Word is present today, who we hear on Christmas morning, although the Word does not sound much like words at all, but a baby’s cry. A baby’s cry echoing through the cosmic dimensions, stretching to-the-beginning and into the future, a baby’s cry is the Word for us today. A baby’s cry that tells us, puts into flesh, gives us a mental picture that our God has arrived. A cry, in the flesh, that gives us hope.

That’s what God announces through the Christ child, as the Word for us today: I am here. For the Word that was present at the beginning of the ages is made flesh in the person of the Christ child. God says, though I stretch to the farthest reaches of the galaxy, I am here in the most concrete, small, vulnerable way: as a child. I am here in the smell of birth and barn. I am here, outside, among the poor, without a roof over my head. I am here.

I am here. God is here. God has brought light into our world that can so easily be filled with the darkness of sin, and brokenness, and hurt and pain.

God, the Word, full of grace and truth has come in the baby Jesus. God is with us, Emmanuel, in the flesh. This is good news that we hear. That God offers light and presence and hope in the midst of our lives. Let us celebrate this gift of a God who comes to us, and worship him.

Amen.