

## John 1:1-18

Christmas Day + December 25, 2018  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
Pastor Tim Pauls  
Words and Light, Fingers and Toes

The Word of the Lord from John 1:12-13: "To all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Words and light, light and words. You know them both well.

So imagine a beam of light shining out through space – a laser beam, if you like. How would you describe it? You might say that it is very bright or dim, harsh or warm, constant or blinking; and you will probably talk about what color it is. But you will never say of a beam of light, "Were its toenails trimmed?"

Imagine how you might describe words. There are big words and little words, important and trivial, long and short, specific and general, literal and metaphorical, beautiful and ugly. You can describe words in all sorts of ways, but you would never think to ask, "How many fingers do they have?"

That's the sort of silly question you ask a six-year-old to convince them that you are a silly person, because even children know that light doesn't have toes and words don't have fingers. Light is energy and words are abstracts: they don't have body parts.

Now if it is absurd to think that light or words might have fingers and toes, it is far more fantastical to think that God would have fingers and toes. You might disagree, but you've been spoiled: you're so used to nativity scenes and the usual run of Christmas carols that you think it's perfectly natural that God has fingers and toes. Matthew and Luke make it easy, what with all the spoilers they give: when they tell the Christmas story, they start out with a baby in a manger, and you can identify with a baby right away. Then you get to watch Him grow up and reveal Himself as the only-begotten Son. He does this miracle and that wonder, and you read the text and gradually end up saying, "No ordinary human being could do the sorts of things that He's doing, so I suppose it makes sense that He's divine." And if you don't catch on very quickly, then the gospels provide the occasional disciple, Gentile, or even a demon to declare that He's the holy Son of God.

Not John. He comes at you from the other direction, which is why the Christmas Day sermon is always the nerdy sermon for Christmas. John starts in the beginning. Quite literally. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." There are no fingers and toes in that statement. There is God the Father, maker of heaven and earth; there is God the only-begotten Son, here also called the Word; and there is God the Holy Spirit, because Genesis 1 tells us that He is there too.

The Son of God is in the beginning because He is there before the beginning. He has to be because He's God, and because "All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." God creates everything by *speaking*, so it makes perfect sense that all things are made through the One who is called *the Word*.

Still with me? Because this is just nerdy enough for Christmas Day that I think I'm giving myself a headache. But let's think this through.

That baby in the manger has been around before matter existed, just minus the body because, well, before the beginning there is no matter – no bodies or a world on which they can dwell. And yet, although He lacks that body or any sort of matter, He is totally complete because He is God and God is totally complete as spirit. Being totally complete and totally God, all of God's qualities and attributes are true of Him; so, as I make the confirmands memorize, He is omnipotent or all-powerful. He is omnipresent, or present everywhere. He is omniscient, or all-knowing. He is eternal, without beginning or end.

If you're thinking to yourself that this rather hard to grasp, you're on the right track, but the phrase you're really looking for is "*impossible to grasp*." For instance, we really don't even know what it's like to be all-knowing: the best we can do is say, "We know we don't know everything, and God knows a lot more than that."

So after John throws all this at us with his talk of words and light, then he says this: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

The Word became flesh: now you've got God – God Himself! – with fingers and toes. But hold on, because it's still beyond our understanding. After all, He's still the omnipotent Son of God, but at this point He's swaddled and can't move because the blanket is stronger than He is. He's still all-powerful; but as an infant, He can't even lift up His head on His own.

He's still the omnipresent Son of God – there is no place where He isn't. But now there is one place where He is: He's specifically in one manger. And as we just noted, He can't relocate because the blanket is still stronger than He is.

He's still the omniscient Son of God – He knows all things. You know what else? One of these days He's even going to figure out that the toes at the end of His feet are His. But not yet. He's a baby.

He's still the eternal Son of God, without beginning or end. Except now He has a birthday. He who was before the beginning is now a few hours old.

I told you before that it was absurd to imagine light or words with fingers and toes. This is crazier yet. The Creator of light in the manger might not yet have opened His eyes. The Word who speaks all things into being with words has yet to learn His ABCs. But even as He nurses at His mother's breast, He is still holding the creation together.

That's the wonder, the miracle of Christmas. It's not just that a baby is born: babies get born all the time. It's not just that God is all-powerful and all the rest, because God is always all-powerful and all the rest. It's not just that the Savior is born, but who the Savior *is*: the Word, the Son of God, becomes flesh to dwell among us. So when Isaiah says, "How beautiful are the feet of him who brings good news," it turns out that it's not metaphor: God has feet. When He bares His holy arm in the same reading, it's not what the literary types call an anthropomorphism: God now actually has an arm – two of them, in fact. It's miracle and it's mystery: don't try to figure out how this can be, because the Incarnation is only accomplished by the wisdom of God, far beyond our understanding. God doesn't even try to answer that question for us, so it's useless for us to ask how this can be.

But He does want us to ask this question: why? Why does God have fingers and toes? Why does He have beautiful feet and holy arms?

John says it this way: Jesus is born of Mary so that you might be born of God.

As long as we're talking about silly, ridiculous, inconceivable ideas, we might as well throw this one out here too: it's the idea of you being born of God. Instead of light and words, let's talk about apples. Let's say that you're making your traditional Waldorf salad for Christmas; and as you reach for the next apple to slice, you notice that it is rotten. It is, in fact, so rotten inside that only the skin is holding it in its present, apple-y shape. Needless to say, you do not add that apple into the salad. When something is corrupted, it's beyond help – you can't uncorrupt it. You don't even give a second thought about throwing it away, which is rather unkind, because what did that apple ever do to you?

Even on December 25 when you come to Good Shepherd, you get to hear that you're sinful and corrupted. You don't get a day off from being sinful, not even on Christmas, because this starts to answer the *why* of Christmas. Christ is born to save sinners; and apart from His grace, you, my friends, are rotten apples. Actually, you're worse: apples simply go bad because they're in a fallen creation, which would be enough to do you in too; however, on top of that sinful nature you've got, you're also saying, doing and thinking things that only corrupt you more. And if you can't even uncorrupt an apple, it would be pretty arrogant of you to think that you can uncorrupt yourself.

That's why Jesus is born, and this is nothing new to you. You say this almost all the time when you talk about Christmas, because you talk about Christmas all year round in the creed when you say, "who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man."

"For us and for our salvation:" that why Jesus is born of Mary. That's why He has fingers and toes. That's why He has beautiful feet and holy arms.

He becomes flesh to save you, because you're made of flesh and blood, body and soul. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, the wages of sin is death, and He is born of Mary to pick up the tab. He has feet so that they can be nailed to a cross, and arms and hands for the same reason. The joy of Christmas is that Christ the Savior is born, and that is how He saves.

Jesus is born of Mary so that you might be born of God, and John tells you exactly how that happens. Just two chapters later, you hear Jesus telling Nicodemus, "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:5). This is baptism, where Jesus shares His life, death and resurrection with you! That's how you are born of God: your baptism is the mirror of Christmas for you. So, for instance, in the joy and mirth of heaven where angels rejoice when sinners repent, I might imagine that on April 30, 1967 when I was baptized, an angel declared to the Lord, "Unto You is born this day in the city of Seattle, a child, who is called Timothy John." And so it is for you: Jesus is born of Mary so that you might be born of God – and so that, on the Last Day, He will raise you up holy, uncorrupted, better than you ever have been, fingers and toes and all. As Christmas gifts go, you're not going to top that.

All of this is yours because the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, eternal Son of God is born of Mary and swaddled in a manger. Not only that, but the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, eternal Son of God is present here, swaddled in bread and wine, to give you grace and salvation. *That's* quite a Christmas gift too.

And does that not change your life?

You live a life full of hope. Tons of people you encounter have no hope of anything past the grave, and so they're haunted by their fears of mortality. But you live in hope! No matter how much your fingers ache from arthritis, or no matter how many times you stub your toes, you can wiggle them and know that they'll be wiggling better than ever for eternity. Why? Look in the manger: it's because Jesus has fingers and toes.

You live in thankfulness. Jesus does not become flesh to help Himself, but to save you. He is born for the express purpose of your redemption by His death and resurrection; and if you walk in the footsteps of your Savior, how do you not give thanks to God to serve those around you, even those who make it difficult?

You live in joy. If God is for us, who can be against us? He did not spare His own Son, but overshadowed Mary that Christ might be born for your salvation. And if He even uses something as ugly as Christ's crucifixion for your good, how can you not be confident that He will use all things for your good? Where this holiday season fulfills your joyful hopes, it is a reflection of God's grace and love for you; and where it fails, it is a reminder of how good eternal life will be. In Christ, you can't lose.

And so you live penitently. It's still so easy to be the rotten apple, to live as if you do not have that hope, that thankfulness, that joy and that grace. Sin will still work to corrupt you daily; and so you repent daily, for you know that Christ died for these sins too. Why? So that you might be "born children of God, who [are] born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

This, my friends, is the wonder of Christmas: God has fingers and toes. The Word has become flesh, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary so that you might be born of God. And so you are.

A blessed Christmas to you all.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen