

“Our Identity Has Been From The Beginning”

Isaiah 52:7-10

Psalm 98

Hebrews 1-4

John 1:1-14

The hope, peace, joy, love, and Christ candles have been lit. The birth of Jesus calls you to walk in the interval between birth and death with the future and present hope, peace, joy, and love of God to light your way.

In an article from *Christianity Today* entitled “Christmas in Afghanistan,” Leigh Bishop writes: [After watching the casket be unloaded from the military vehicle], I find myself walking along.... the main avenue of Bagram Airfield.... Soldiers holding candles are belting out Christmas carols with gusto. Down the street, luminaries brighten the walkway into the clamshell-shaped auditorium, where cheerful groups of uniformed men and women enter for a Christmas concert. Two blocks away, the chapel is filling for the six o’clock Christmas Eve service.

War, writes C.S. Lewis in the essay “Learning in War-Time,” reveals a hunger in human beings for joy and meaning that will not be set aside for even the most difficult of circumstances Jesus did not come just to provide an occasion to sing carols, drink toasts, feast, and exchange gifts. But we are right to do these things, even as soldiers die and families grieve, because he came. And in his coming, he brought joy and peace—the joy that overcomes our sorrows, and the only kind of peace that ultimately matters. It’s the peace of which the end of all wars, terrible as they are, is merely one token. It’s the peace that means the long war between the heart and its Maker is over. It’s a peace treaty offered in Bethlehem and signed, in blood, on Calvary.

Bishop concludes: “So joy to the world, and to every celebrating or grieving or hurting soul in it. The Lord has come. Let heaven and nature—and even those who stand watch with lighted candles in the land of the shadow of death—sing.”¹

Isaiah 52:7-10, Psalm 98, Hebrews 1:1-4, and John 1:1-14 raise the theme that the birth of Jesus, his coming into the world is to be celebrated.

¹Leigh C. Bishop, “Christmas in Afghanistan,” *Christianity Today* (December 2009), 36-37.

Isaiah 52:7-10 addresses the impact of light, hope, peace, joy and love on loss and grief, specifically, but the human experience generally. The radical inbreaking of God into human experience with the birth of Jesus changed everything. God's deliverance beckons the world to burst into song. When the sun rises, the birds sing. Isaiah asks Jerusalem to wake up from its sleep. The new day has begun. The exiles are returning. The Holy God of Israel is faithful. The ruined Jerusalem will be restored. And the promise of the Messiah becomes more immanent with each passing day. Isaiah 52:10 "The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."

Psalm 98 celebrates and honors the radical inbreaking of God into human experience with the birth of Jesus. Jesus is all powerful God who is intentional in God's engagement in the world and with humankind bringing about justice and equity. Psalm 98:4-6 announces "Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD."

Hebrews 1:1-4 connects directly to the overall theme of the radical inbreaking of God into human experience in the birth of Jesus, but specifically the theme of the Gospel text, John 1:1-14 demonstrating that Jesus is the manifestation of God's Word. Jesus is God and that all things were created through Jesus. Hebrews 1:1-3 reads,

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.

John 1:1-14 sums up the extent of God’s radical inbreaking into human experience. Know that Jesus came to save the world as the living Word of God. Yes, the Old Testament was codified in the 2nd Century CE and the New Testament in the 4th Century CE. Thus, the Word, living and written, continues to transform the world and human experience. John 1:1-5 reads, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”²

Your identity has been from the beginning. Celebrating the birth of Jesus beckons you to walk in the interval between birth and death knowing and experiencing that God provides light for the path you’re walking...the journey you’re taking. Jesus gave you your true sense of self, sense of worth, and identity. Pastor and author Timothy Keller writes, “My identity is based on somebody who was excluded for me, who was cast out for me, who loved his enemies, and that is going to turn me into someone who embraces the Different.”³ Merry Christmas! Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations)
on Sunday, 25 December 2022 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh at
Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

Copyright © 2022
Steven M. Marsh
All Rights Reserved

²In all five sections of textual analysis, I have benefited from the thinking of Sandra Hack-Polaski, Paul K. Hooker, Christine J. Hong, Patricia J. Calahan, Robert W. Wall, Todd B. Jones, and Sally Smith-Holt in *Connections, Year A, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 98-100, 100-101, 102-103, 104-106, 106-108, 109-111 and 111-113.

³Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God* (New York, New York: Viking, 2016), 151.