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John 1:1-5, 10-14
GOD DID WHAT?

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There are Christmas Eve people and there are Christmas Day people. For some reason, most people do not go to church both on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. They choose one or the other. I love both of them for different reasons. Christmas Eve is generally much more emotional. It takes place in the evening. We like the lights in the church with the tree and other decorations. Many people get very sentimental as they sing Silent Night by candlelight. We think of many Christmases past with family members who are no longer with us. Those memories span the years. Perhaps the snow is lightly falling as we leave the church. Children are anticipating their presents and most people go off to spend Christmas with their families. On Christmas Eve, we focus our attention on the nativity. We see that stable with Mary and Joseph, the angels, and the shepherds, and above all, the Christ child, the Savior of the world. It is very beautiful and moving!

Christmas Day is different. You don't have the anticipation buildup anymore. The Christmas tree looks much different in the daylight. The children have opened their presents and are looking forward to getting home to play with them. Christmas Day usually will have a smaller attendance than Christmas Eve by both members and visitors. It is less emotional. But that is a good thing. We are better prepared to deal with the central affirmation of the Christian faith which is also the central offense of that faith. On Christmas Day we focus our attention on the incarnation. We ask, "GOD DID WHAT?"

Christmas is a time of pondering. As Mary celebrated the birth of her Son, she would ponder and weigh all the things that she had experienced. What a whirlwind nine months! The angel Gabriel came to her and told her that she, a virgin, would have a child that was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Her fiancé Joseph would also be visited by an angel and he would take Mary as his wife even though the child she was carrying was not his own. She would visit her relative Elizabeth who would also give birth to a miraculous baby, who would be known as John the Baptist. Mary and Joseph would make the long trip to Bethlehem from Nazareth in Galilee, fulfilling the decree of Caesar Augustus. She would give birth to her Son in a lowly stable. They would be visited by shepherds who had been visited by angels. Their Savior had been born and they came to worship him. How could we possibly begin to imagine all the thoughts that were running through Mary's mind?

We are left to ponder as well. We dwell on the greatest mystery in the universe. God became man. Just let that sink in! "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." Those words remind us of the very first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis. Genesis means "beginning." We have the beginning of the universe, this world, and the human race. But God always was. God always existed. Our puny minds cannot even begin to understand such a concept.

God is not a silent being. He wants to communicate about himself. We see a Person called the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. These are the truths we confess in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. We speak words that we cannot comprehend, nevertheless they are true. Our God is one God in three distinct Persons. One of those Persons is the Word who is eternal and uncreated and unchangeable and infinite.

The Word did not merely exist in the beginning. The Word was functional and active. All creation came into being through him. God spoke and it was so. He is both life and light. Life and light are connected. The opposites are

death and darkness. The Word is life. He would declare: "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." "I am the resurrection and the life."

He is also light. Here he would declare, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." "Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." The light is more powerful than the darkness and will not be extinguished. That light will continue to shine for all eternity. The darkness cannot put out that light.

All these things are true and all of them are real, but here comes the kicker. God did what? He became one of us. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." As we go back to creation, we know that Adam and Eve rebelled against God. Satan convinced them that they should not be content merely being creatures, dependent upon God. Although God provided them with everything they could ever need or want, they did not want to be human. They wanted to be like God. They wanted to be God. They didn't want to be servants. They wanted to be lords. They were not content with being creatures.

Since man demanded to be God and brought death and darkness into the world, God would become man and bring life and light into the world. The Lord would become not merely a man, but a servant who would do every lowly task imaginable. He would become obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

The Word became flesh. This is truly a miracle. He who is infinite, he whom the heavens cannot contain for he fills all things, now becomes a child. He takes up residence in the womb of his mother Mary for nine months and now he who is surrounded by the holy angels singing his eternal praise, now lies in a bed of straw filled with animal saliva. He who is all powerful will lay aside his power and submit himself to the will of sinful man. He who cannot die will voluntarily lay down his life so that we can live forever. He does this to restore the paradise we had lost. He does this to restore us to God's family. He does this because he is love.

"This is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Love is not an emotion floating around out there. Love always shows itself in actions. This is the action God took. He saw our helplessness and did something about it. He became one of us. There is nothing you or I did to bring Christmas about. We were helpless, unable to do anything. There was nothing we could offer to God but our sin and guilt. God did everything. He planned Christmas already in the Garden of Eden as our naked parents stood there in guilt and shame. He continued to make those plans known throughout the centuries. And then on that cold Judean night, the Word became flesh.

He made his dwelling among us. Literally the text reads, "He pitched his tent among us." As Israel made its journey out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land, they were assured of God's presence in the tabernacle or tent. God physically assured them of his presence. If you could not sleep at night and wondered whether God was with you, you only had to look at the tabernacle. You would see the pillar of fire and you could say, "God is with us. All is well." During the day if you wondered whether you should go or stay or in what direction you should go, you looked to the pillar of cloud and could say, "We can go. God is leading us." Christmas is the assurance of God's presence with us.

Not everyone would accept that. "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." Why would that be? Let's go back once again. Man wanted to be God. We want to use power and glory for ourselves. We want to crush our enemies. If God really did become man, he would not come as he did, born in a barn, visited by common, dirty shepherds, considered to be illegitimate and born out of wedlock, living in Galilee, learning the trade of a carpenter, and dying the death of common criminals. No, if God was to come to earth, he would have to show his power and glory. He would destroy the Roman armies occupying Palestine. He would crush Herod and Pilate and Caesar and everyone else.

The people always demanded signs from Jesus, miracles that would show them who he was. Giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, the ability to walk to the lame, cleansing for lepers, and raising the dead were not enough. But what really convinced the people to reject him was that he loved the unlovable. He associated with that kind of people. Yes, it started with his birth. The shepherds simply arrived. They probably didn't go home, wash up, and put on their best clothes. They simply heard the message of the angels and rushed to Bethlehem to worship their Savior. Jesus would continue to reach out to the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the outcasts of society. He would give them the forgiveness of sins, direction, meaning, and a new life. He didn't ignore their sins. He didn't excuse their sins. He forgave their sins. He set them free for a life of serving God in love because God loved them first.

He came for you and me. He came to give you life. He came to give you light. He came to take all your sins and failures upon himself and give you the righteousness that you needed. He came to be one of us, a king who would give up his glory to become a servant, so that we who are servants might become kings and reign with him in heaven.

On this Christmas Day we say, "God did what?" "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." The true glory of God will be found in the manger, in a life of humility, on an instrument of torture reserved for the worst of criminals. It will be found in water and in bread and wine. It will be found in things despised and rejected by the world. But we see the glory. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." That's what God did! AMEN.