

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla

**Scripture:** John 1:10-18

*John 1:10-18: <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup>He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— <sup>13</sup>children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. <sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup>(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") <sup>16</sup>Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. <sup>17</sup>For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*

An elephant was thoroughly enjoying himself as he splashed about in the river. A mouse was perched on the sandy shore. It was obvious that he was disturbed about something. The mouse yelled at the elephant, "Come out of the water at once." The elephant laughed and said, "Why should I come out? The mouse was not about to be humiliated by this mountain of flesh. He kept yelling and yelling.

The elephant realized that if he wanted any peace and quiet, he had better come out of the water. Slowly the elephant lumbered out of the water and stood towering over the mouse. "Now, why did you want me to come out of the water?" The mouse looked up and said, "I wanted to see if you were wearing my bathing suit."

It is easier for us to understand how an elephant could wear a mouse's bathing suit than it is for us to understand the awesome mystery of incarnation—God's Word became flesh. He wore our suit of flesh. Think about it. For many, this is true.

Tomorrow is Epiphany. Epiphany is an ancient church festival celebrating the magi's visit to the Christ Child (Matthew 2:1-12). It is kept on January 6. Epiphany is also called "Three Kings' Day" and "Twelfth Day"—the latter name because January 6 is twelve days after Christmas. It is celebrated mainly in Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and other liturgical churches.

The word epiphany means "manifestation" or "revelation"—a time when something is shown, displayed, or materialized to an audience. Thus, the holiday celebrates the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, represented by the magi. For some, Epiphany also commemorates the baptism of Jesus and His turning water into wine—both displays of Christ's divinity to the world.

Instead of revisiting the Matthew story of the visit of the Magi to the Christ child for this season of Epiphany, we are turning to the Gospel of John, chapter one, for it, too, discusses the epiphany of God through His Son, Jesus. The Gospel of John is not like the other three Gospels—a chronological story of the life of Jesus—and the lessons Jesus taught through preaching and parables.

John, an apostle, writing to New-Christians and searching non-Christians, wrote his book to prove conclusively that Jesus is the Son of God, meaning he was both divine and human, and that all who believed in him will have eternal life. It's in this Gospel that we find the recording of eight miracles, six of which are unique to the Gospel of John. In fact, over 90 percent of what is written by John is unique to his Gospel—again, because his purpose for writing was different than the purpose of the other Gospel writers.

So here in chapter one of John's Gospel is the prologue for his argument of Christ's humanity and divinity. Beginning with verse one where we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." What does John mean by, "The Word"?

In the Hebrew scriptures—the Old Testament—the Word describes how God created the world. He spoke it into existence. The Word means the messages spoken by the prophets. The Word was God's law which was holy. The Word was another expression for God. However, in Greek philosophy, the Word was the principle of reason that governed the world, or the thought still in the mind, not a living being.

John's description of the Word shows clearly that he is speaking of Jesus, a human being whom he personally knew and loved but at the same time the Creator of the universe, the ultimate revelation of God, the living picture of God's holiness, the One in whom, as it says in Colossians 1:17, "all things hold together." To the Jews who read this, the "Word was God" was offensive and ungodly. To the Greek readers, John's saying later in verse 14 that "the Word became flesh" was totally absurd.

But, herein lies the Good News John shares with us that the epiphany is the revelation of God through His only Son, Jesus, the Christ. While there never was a time when God did not exist and while there never was a moment when God was not actively involved with all of creation, including humanity, there was a disconnect between God and the people and His Creation that he so dearly loved. So, God found it necessary to come to our world in human form, becoming very personal and real to make himself known.

John tells us that there was never any darkness, or rather, any evil that has overcome God's light, nor will it ever overcome or extinguish His light, because Jesus brought the light to humankind, making it so that we see ourselves for who we really are, sinners in need of a Savior, a Savior delivering God's unconditional love to us, showing us how God wants us to live, and ultimately saving us from our own sinful nature.

Leith Anderson wrote this story to shed some light on who this Jesus is. He wrote, "Several years ago, I was visiting Manila and was taken, of all places, to the Manila garbage dump. Tens of thousands of people make their homes on that dump site. They have constructed shacks out of the things other people have thrown away. And they send their children out early every morning to scavenge for food in other people's garbage so they can have family meals.

"People have been born and raised on the garbage dump. They have had their families and died there without ever going anywhere else, even into the city of Manila. It is an astonishing thing.

"But Americans also live on that garbage dump. They are missionaries who have chosen to leave their own country to communicate the love of Jesus Christ to people who otherwise would never hear it. That is amazing, but not as amazing as the journey our Savior made from heaven to earth. The Son of God knew what he was doing. He knew where he was going. He knew what the sacrifice would be. He journeyed from heaven to earth on a mission to save the human race."

Jesus, "The Word became flesh," meaning he became human, came to be our perfect teacher. It's in his life that we see how God thinks and, therefore, how we should think. He became our perfect example, a model of what we are to become, showing us how to live and giving us the power to live that way. He came as the perfect sacrifice for all of our sins, satisfying God's requirements for the removal of sin. He came as the perfect conqueror, conquering death—His resurrection opening the doors to God and eternity with God. Jesus came to save us all.

John writes about the world not recognizing Jesus, the Word Made Flesh, Jesus. Today as we ask ourselves, who is this man Jesus, we should be asking ourselves if we recognize Jesus in our lives today?

One of the youth programs I did with groups I called "Coffee Shop Night." At these Sunday evening events, we discussed the challenges of life, current events, and our Christians responses to these things. Because there was no prepared lesson for this activity, I never knew what topics to expect as a part of our discussion. It was usually our best attended activity, and it offered the best setting for teaching moments and spiritual nurturing.

On one particular night, I don't remember what we were discussing that led me to ask this question—"Would you recognize Jesus if he walked into our youth room right now?" Many of them believed that they would. I pushed them a bit further as to why they thought they would recognize him.

That wasn't as easy for them to answer, and I don't remember all of their responses, but the ones I do remember are that they felt that the things they learned from the bible and from church would help them recognize him. They said he would probably be someone different, meaning not someone they would expect to be Jesus, so they would know he was Jesus. I thought that was an interesting answer.

So now, as we are pondering this text from John, I'm wondering if we would recognize Jesus if he walked into our (place of worship) sanctuary right now? If so, how would we recognize him? Why would we recognize him? Would we welcome him? Or, would we walk right past him, ignore him, write him off as a loser because he doesn't fit our mold? It's an interesting thing to think about, especially when you consider that He **IS** with us, right here, right now.

Maybe the more important question to consider is, do you personally recognize Jesus in your life now? If so, how do you know it's him? If you do recognize him in your life, you know it because you invited him into your heart and he changed you. You had an epiphany, if you will. You openly, hungrily, welcomed his manifestation, his revelation in your life and it changed you. The change runs so deep in you that, day in and day out, not just on Sundays, it shapes all that you say and do. This is a key component of being missional, of revealing Jesus to others

If you don't recognize Jesus in your life, maybe you haven't invited him to be in your heart. Or if you have, maybe something has gotten in the way, something that you are allowing to manipulate your openness to letting him change you. Whatever the reason, this man named Jesus, the Word, God, made flesh, is asking to be in your life.

Tedd was five years older than Janet, finished college before she did, and was working in a city hundreds of miles from her. They always seemed to be at different places in their lives. But they had been dating for seven years.

Every Valentine's Day, Tedd would propose marriage, and Janet would say, "No, not yet."

Finally, when they were both living in Dallas, Tedd reached the end of his patience. He bought a ring, took Janet to a romantic restaurant, and prepared to give her the diamond. Another no would mean he would get on with his life without her.

After salad, entrée and dessert, Tedd was ready. But realizing Janet had a gift for him, he asked, "What did you bring me?" She handed him a box the size of a book. He opened the package and slowly peeled away the tissue paper. It was a cross-stitch Janet had made that simply said, "Yes."

It was the word Tedd longed to hear. It's also the word that God, in His tireless pursuit of the sinner, longs to hear.

God became flesh and dwelt among us through Jesus. He still dwells among us today. Do you know him?