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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
25 December 2025

Sermon on John 1:14

Worship Theme:

CHRIST THE SAVIOR IS BORN

Jesus has been God from eternity, holy and majestic. When we look tenderly at the holy infant, we are looking at the same God who once told the prophet Moses, "No one may see me and live." Yet, Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds all saw their holy God and survived. How? God became human, hiding his glory within flesh, so that he could come to us without instilling fear or dread. A famous theologian once said, "We are to think of the Lord's birth, where the Word became flesh, not as a past event which we recall, but as a present reality on which we gaze." It's not that Christ the Savior was born. It's that Christ the Savior is born.

Sermon Theme: "This Much"

How much are you loved? We know that love is something we all need, and we can certainly tell the difference between being loved and not being loved. But how do you know how much someone else loves you? To answer that, we would probably look at the way they treat us, how they act when we're with them, what they say to us and about us, what they do for us, maybe even what they give to us.

At Christmas, it's usually pretty easy to feel loved. At least, that's what all the people who feel loved assume. But what if you don't? What if you're not feeling loved this Christmas? Maybe this year has absolutely destroyed you and you're barely getting through each day. Maybe the relationships you thought were forever in your life vanished into thin air. Maybe the people you counted on let you down. Maybe you lost your job and are now struggling to make ends meet. Maybe no matter where you went this year and no matter how many people you tried to meet and make friends with and get to know better, or no matter how much effort you put into strengthening or healing fragile family relationships this year, you'll still be alone this Christmas, unwrapping the only presents under the tree – the ones you bought yourself. As you're sitting there silently sipping your coffee and looking around a decorated yet empty room, do you wonder how much you are loved? Or maybe you ask even more pointedly – AM I loved at all?

As important as these questions are, the questions that is really behind them all is "Should I be loved?" And the answer we all need to honestly give to that question is "no." No, we should not be loved. The reason is because no matter how many nice words we say, how many helpful things we do around the house, at church, or in the community, and no matter how nice the gifts we give to other people are, we will still never do enough to earn or deserve love. Maybe you've heard the sentiment expressed that "everyone deserves to be loved." It sounds nice and it's meant to be comforting, but it's not actually true. In reality, no one deserves to be loved. The bad things we do always outweigh the good. The hurt we cause will always leave scars. To our very core, we are beings unworthy of love.

And if we read God's Word carefully, we will notice that God doesn't argue against that point. Psalm 51 says – *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.* Romans chapters 7 and 8 say – *For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.* Ephesians 2 says – *Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.* Our sin has made it abundantly clear that nobody deserves love from anybody. I don't deserve it, you don't deserve it, none of us deserve it. And because God agrees, it shouldn't be too difficult to figure out how our stories should go. We should be born into this world, have challenges and hardships and suffering for a while, and then die. All we rightly deserve from God is for him to wipe the world clean and be done with humanity forever, like he did with the Flood in the days of Noah, only this time finish the job and take us all out. *The wages of sin is death* (Rom. 6), God's Word says, so that's all we should expect. Certainly no reason to expect a Merry Christmas, filled with love, happiness, and joy.

That is, until God gives us a reason. In fact, the glorious Gospel promises of Christmas couldn't be more joyful and worthy of celebrating. At Christmas, God looks at each one of us and says, "I know you don't deserve love from anyone. And here is my love for you anyway." And he doesn't just throw out meaningless words or whisper sweet nothings into our ears. No, God backs up his statements of undeserved love for us with the most powerful actions the world has ever seen: *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.*

It doesn't matter if you've heard these words every Christmas for the past 75 years or if this is the very first time you're hearing them, please listen very closely. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the *in-the-beginning Word-was-God* (John 1:1), *became flesh and made his dwelling among us.* To a world of people who deserve a second Flood, God instead sent his Son. What does that mean for us? It means everything is different now.

The Word became flesh means God has personally entered our human story in a way he never had before – by becoming one of us. Why did he need to do this? Because our sinful nature and the sins we commit every day had disqualified us from heaven. We had no hope for eternity. So God became one of us to live a perfect life in place of us – to *make his dwelling among us*, to endure every temptation, to obey every law and command, and to do it all successfully so that our story would receive a new ending.

And he didn't do this for us because we somehow managed to please him or figured out a way to get on his good side or because we did anything at all to deserve it. No, God chose to do this for us simply because of his grace – the undeserved love he has for all people. That's a love he has for all of us just because he wants to. That love tears down the barrier we built between him and us with our disobedience and sin. God tears it down through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. *The Word became flesh* in order to live a perfectly obedient life in our place. *The Word became flesh* in order to die the death and take all the punishment our

disobedience rightly deserves. And *the Word became flesh* in order to rise again from the dead, opening the door to life after death, eternal life in heaven with him.

The Word became flesh to show us something we did not have the right to see before: *the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* God warned in the Old Testament, “No one may see me and live.” (Exodus 33) But when *the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, the one and only Son who came from the Father* changed that. Jesus brought the full glory of God to earth in a way human beings could see – he *made his dwelling among us!* The full glory of God came to this world to bring a message of the most profound mercy and love – *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* ¹⁷ *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.* (John 3:16-17) Not to condemn, but to save. Because he loves.

So let's work backward through our questions from before. Should we be loved? No, but God gladly decides to love us anyway. Are we loved? Yes, most definitely – God says so and he proves it by what he chooses to do for us and give to us. And it doesn't matter if we've had the best year ever or the worst year ever. It doesn't matter if the job is steady or if the search is ongoing. It doesn't matter if our Christmas celebrations are filled with generations of laughter and squeals of delight from our family and friends or if we find ourselves staring at the tree all alone with our thoughts. None of these parts of our lives have the power to change what God himself has declared – we are loved. YOU are loved.

How much are we loved? To answer that, we might be tempted to look at how people act around us, what they say, what they do or what they give. But the answer is perhaps more easily found in the words you might hear in an interaction with a child who wants to know how much you love them. As you open your arms as wide and far as they can possibly go, you say, “I love you **THIS MUCH!**”

And in those words, we also find God's answer to our question. How much are we loved? God our Father looks at each one of us, smiles, and says, “**This much** – *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.* While reflecting on these powerful words of love, I couldn't help but think of a hymn the students of our school sang just a couple weeks ago. It talks most beautifully about this love profound love God has for us:

Love has come, a light in the darkness! Love shines forth in the Bethlehem skies.
See, all heaven has come to proclaim it; hear how their song of joy arises:
Love! Love! Born unto you, a Savior! Love! Love! Glory to God on high!

Love is born! Come share in the wonder. Love is God now asleep in the hay.
See the glow in the eyes of His mother; what is the name her heart is saying?
Love! Love! Love is the name she whispers. Love! Love! Jesus, Immanuel.

Love has come and never will leave us! Love is life everlasting and free.

Love is Jesus within and among us. Love is the peace our hearts are seeking.
Love! Love! Love is the gift of Christmas.
Love! Love! Praise to You, God on high! (CW'21 #364, Love Has Come)

The Word became flesh, and Jesus has come. Not to condemn, but to save, to deliver, to forgive, and to open the gates of eternal life as a free gift. God's bold declaration which nothing can alter, change, or stop: "I love you **THIS MUCH.**" Merry Christmas indeed. Amen!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.