CHRISTMAS SEASON PLANNING GUIDE

YEAR A

2025

# THE WORD THAT BREAKS THE DARKNESS

Pastor Mark Anderson


**GOD'S WORD IS LIFE**



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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

These lectionary reflections open with a commentary on John One, setting the tone for everything that follows. The opening words of John are not mild—they resound like the music of creation itself, fierce and luminous. "In the beginning was the Word." That is not poetry for quiet nights; it is thunder announcing a world remade. The Christmas season begins there—not in sentiment or snowy light, but in the astonishing truth that God has spoken Himself into our flesh. The child in the manger is less a symbol of peace than the invasion of grace.

This is the joy of Christmas—not the soft joy of escape, but the radiant joy of broken chains. The light shines *in* the darkness, not around it. The birth of Christ is not a decoration on human goodness; it is the dawn of a new creation. Every carol, every candle, every gathered feast should tremble with that reality: God has come, not to be admired, but to reclaim what is His.

The Word became flesh. Not a vision, not a dream, not a divine whisper to the worthy—but flesh. Wrinkled, crying, hungry flesh. The infinite has folded Himself into the finite; the eternal has entered time. This is joy with muscle and bone, laughter that has survived the grave. Heaven has not sent an idea but a child, and in that child, the world's wound is already being healed.

So let the season be full, not tame. Let the hymns be loud, the lights unashamed, the feast generous. But let them all point toward this blazing center: that in the birth of Christ, God's mercy has taken form, and every sorrow stands under a sky that has split open with song.

Christmas joy is not the denial of darkness—it is its undoing, its breaking. It is the great shout of creation reborn: the Word has come, and nothing will ever be the same.

# A COMMENTARY ON JOHN ONE

## The Word That Breaks The Darkness

Pastor Mark Anderson

Among the ancients, the cosmos inspired awe and dread in equal measure. They did not stand apart from it, they stood *within* it, aware that each breath, each word, might sustain or undo the balance of reality. The same word that healed could destroy; the same river that nourished could drown. To speak, to act, to live, was to participate in a vast mystery whose power could never be tamed—only honored, invoked, and feared.

Thus, the world was not as much a problem to be analyzed as it was a sacred drama to be entered, one where every stone, star, and syllable shimmered with the presence of the divine, creative powers that bound wonder and terror into a single breath.

We moderns, however, live in a disenchanted universe. The stars no longer sing; they obey equations. We have learned to describe with exquisite precision what once could only be adored with mystery, wonder and terror. To the ancient Roman, the planet Mars, for example, was not a cold sphere of iron and dust but a living omen, a god's eye burning in the night, a fierce, living fire above the world—a god in his element, terrible and familiar. Where the ancient Roman saw a god who demanded blood, the scientist now sees a mirror of human curiosity. Rovers crawl across its plains; satellites trace its orbit. But with the success of reason, something silent has crept in—the suspicion that the cosmos no longer listens, that everything is cold mechanism. Reason has emptied the universe of meaning.

And the church has never quite recovered.

Instead of confronting this silence head-on, it has often tried to make peace with it—turning mystery into marketing, revelation into false assurance, proclamation into apologetics. Others, terrified of reason's scalpel, retreat into brittle dogmatism or sentimental piety, as though doctrinal assertion or nostalgia could stand in for faith. The result is an institution forever reacting, forever negotiating with the very disenchantment it was meant to expose. For to confess that the Infinite once took flesh is to declare war on the very terms of modern certainty—and that, understandably, makes even the pious flinch.

Physicists tells us that the world runs on gravity and quantum fields, and they are right. Yet faith hears those same laws as a kind of grammar. This was John's message to the ancients. He was teaching them to hear the words rightly. The Gospel speaks and says: "In the beginning was the Word….*the logos*. And the *logos* became flesh and lived among us." John was attempting to recalibrate how the ancient mind understood the cosmos.

To speak of religious meaning now sounds, to modern ears, like little more than assertion—pious sentiment dressed in antique phrases, poetry mistaken for physics. The language of John, *"And the Logos became flesh,"* once trembled with revolution. Now his words echo like a hymn from an alien world—strangely moving, perhaps, but safely irrelevant.

To the modern intellect, it smacks of nostalgia, a comforting myth whispered against the void. Gravity and quantum fields have displaced angels and archangels; equations explain more and demand less. Yet precisely because it seems so naïve, the claim retains its sting: what if the poetry were true? What if the universe, for all its equations, still hides a pulse of meaning that reason can measure but never command?

Our English word, *"word",* scarcely carries the weight of the Greek *logos* which John employed. From Heraclitus to Philo, that term bore the gravitas of something immense—the rational pulse beneath the chaos, the deep intelligence that gave coherence to the world. For Heraclitus it was the hidden harmony holding flux in tension; for the Stoics, it was an immanent fire, the divine breath woven through the material cosmos; for Philo, *logos* was the bridge between an unknowable God and the world He had set in motion.

John upended the entire inheritance. He wasn't trying to persuade the philosophers; he was announcing the end of their enterprise. It was an astonishing claim: that the very reason which ordered the stars had once eaten bread, argued with opponents, and died under Roman law on a bloody cross. The *Logos,* he wrote, was not principle or metaphor but person—the living Word who "was with God and was God….the Word became flesh."

How shocking was this? Consider our word *information.* In our age it means data, bits, streams, the endless noise of an illuminated, technological void. It quantifies everything and explains nothing. But imagine if the word were turned, as *Logos* once was—if information were not the glut that buries meaning but the pulse that gives it; not the flood that dehumanizes faces but the pattern that reveals them. What if "the Word became flesh" meant, in our tongue, that code itself was love—that AI was not algorithm but heart? To say that this would be radical would be to undersell it!

John's use of *logos* was nothing less than a collision between metaphysics and mortality. But to our ears, dulled by science and secular sense, John's language no longer disrupts the grammar of reality. He reads like Tolkien or Rowling; the language of fantasy—ethereal, poetic, moving, yes, but not credible as description. We can appreciate the beauty, the audacity, even the moral weight of the idea, but we feel its distance. The modern mind no longer expects the universe to speak. And so, John's thunderous prologue now drifts past the modern world like poetry from a vanished world—haunting precisely because we can no longer quite believe it. Nor, in fact, do we want to.

Light, in John's lexicon, is not an argument that darkness might eventually concede; it is the reality that makes darkness impossible. The two cannot coexist, not because light persuades the dark but because its mere presence unmakes it. Darkness, as too much preaching seems to believe, is not ignorance awaiting illumination. Darkness is resistance itself—the refusal of revelation, the will to stay hidden. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not *overcome* it." The verb carries the sense of *grasping*—and that is the bleak comedy of the human condition: we prefer groping in the dark to seeing in the light. The darkness in this world is not tragic. It is loved.

Therefore, John's later line, "Men loved darkness rather than light," is the only diagnosis that fits. The problem is not mental ignorance but hardened, moral rebellion, not that we do not know but that we do not wish to. The darkness does not misunderstand the light; it rejects it because exposure feels like death, an assault on the fragile order we have built around our desires. And no sequence of historical "facts", however clever, can talk us out of our love affair with concealment.

The human will, as experience and history repeatedly demonstrate, can domesticate any argument, polish any doubt, and make even the most luminous truth seem optional. And nowhere is this more painfully evident than in the modern church's attempts to explain itself. Much of what now passes for Christian apology or theology resembles a desperate exercise in public relations—faith with its tie straightened, the proper academic credentials, and its voice lowered, eager to appear reasonable to a world that has already stopped listening.

One hears the rhetoric of the eternal delivered with the timidity of a press release. Theologians publish books that no one reads. The Incarnation becomes a metaphor for kindness, the Resurrection a symbol of resilience. And the Cross? What better example for all of us to follow than selfless love. In its nervous bid for credibility, the church often succeeds only in appearing absurd: a chorus of certainties sung off-key to an audience long gone home. The tragedy is not that belief looks foolish, but that it forgets how to bear its own offense. For if the claim is true—that the

Infinite once bled on a cross—it will never fit inside polite reason. It is not meant to. The Gospel is not the end of an argument but the intrusion of a presence.

What is needed is not better reasoning but rebirth—the impossible event by which the Word who spoke the first light speaks again into the human heart. And that, one suspects, is why faith still offends the modern intellect, and, to be frank, not a few in the churches: it brings death to the darkness we love; a death that reason, left to itself, will never assent to.

And so we arrive where the arguments always end—in silence, or in speech that is no longer argument. Darkness cannot be coaxed into daylight, and preaching has no business pretending otherwise. Its task is not to flatter reason's vanity with proofs, but to announce what reason cannot invent: that the Word has spoken and still speaks into the darkness we call light.

So, theology, if it is anything at all, as the late Gerhard Forde so fearlessly advocated, is proclamation—the daring, reckless insistence that light has entered the world, uninvited and unearned. The Gospel does not wait for consent; it creates it. It does not persuade; it unveils. Its task is not to defend God before the tribunal of reason but to be the Word that summons life out of death.

Thus, the cosmic battle John names is fought not in the heavens but in every act of speech, every argument that seeks to master rather than to hear. Each word becomes a front line where light and darkness wrestle for possession of the tongue. To preach this—to name such a war aloud—is no small presumption. It ought to make the preacher shudder. For who dares to claim that divine truth might pass through human syntax without distortion, that the Infinite can be spoken by a mouth made of dust?

Here is the scandal: every sermon on the Incarnation risks blasphemy by proximity. The very attempt to articulate it—to give grammar to glory—is an act of reckless faith. And yet, silence would be worse. The preacher stands trembling between arrogance and awe, aware that his words are tinder and that the mystery he names burns through all pretension – including his own. The darkness does not yield to eloquence, but neither does it stay silent. Therefore, the light insists on being spoken, even by those too weak and ill equipped to speak it – and that would be every preacher.

The preacher, therefore, stands not as a witty, winsome, articulate apologist but as a herald, announcing what reason cannot and will not imagine. The light that breaks in does not pander to reason nor does it humiliate. Faith redeems it, giving it back its wonder—no longer the wonder of

ignorance before a cosmos swallowed by mystery, but the wonder of gratitude and trust: that the cosmos, in spite of all rational evidence to the contrary, is a gift.

The preacher speaks, not of abstractions, but of the One in whom the silence itself became Word. This is what John knew. In Jesus Christ, the eternal Logos did not remain philosophical concept or divine metaphor. He entered the grammar of our mortality, spoke our broken speech, bore our contradictions, and—astonishingly—made them His own. On the Cross, that Word reached its fullest articulation: the holy infinite stooping into unholy finitude, the Creator entering the ruin of creation. There the world's darkness gathered itself into one chorus of defiance, and God answered not with condemnation but with forgiveness.

In Jesus of Nazareth the human and the cosmic met—the wound of the world and the heart of God touching, each recognized in the other. The Incarnation is more than an episode within history; it is the still point around which all history turns, the judgment and renewal of all that is. To say "the Word became flesh" is therefore to say that the light and life of God has entered even darkness and death, that the last word spoken over sin is mercy. The preacher who names this mystery does not explain it—she stands beneath it, as dry, brittle kindling before uncreated fire, trembling with gratitude, repeating a truth that *only* the Sprit can ignite, the sentence that both created and redeemed the world: "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*"

## PREACHING THE WORD THAT BECAME FLESH

How does one preach such a Word? How does the frail, fearful, tempted voice of a human preacher speak light into the very darkness that resists it? The temptation is always to soften the claim, to turn mystery into metaphor or doctrine into decorum. But the Word that became flesh will not be managed. It insists on entering the moment of preaching with the same scandal and tenderness with which it entered the world. What follows, then, are not "techniques" but orientations—ways of standing beneath that Word, that it may speak again through mortal breath. To preach the Word made flesh is to stand where revelation meets resistance and to trust that, once again, the light will break the darkness, as God wills.

The preacher who climbs into the pulpit on Christmas morning—or any morning—stands before a mystery that refuses to stay safely in scripture. *"The Word became flesh."* Those words are not a description of an ancient miracle; they are the event still happening in the room.

### 1. The Task

The temptation of every preacher is to make the mystery manageable—to explain it, to defend it, or to render it inspiring. We want the Incarnation to *make sense.* But the Word that became flesh is not an idea to be clarified; it is the invasion of a Presence.

We do not reason our way to that Word; we are spoken into it. Faith does not arise at the end of an argument but in the shattering of one. The preacher's task is therefore not to defend God before the tribunal of reason but to announce that the tribunal itself has been overturned. "The Word became flesh"—not when we understood, but when we could not.

### 2. Law And Gospel: The Breaking And The Breathing

Before there can be gospel, there must be silence. Or, as St. Paul might have put it, every mouth shut in the face of the law. Then one just might hear the sound of collapse as the ladders we have built toward heaven crumble away. The light that entered the world did not arrive to assist the darkness but to expose it. "Men loved darkness rather than light." That is the law in its purest form: revelation as exposure, as undoing.

But if the preacher stops there, the Word remains unspoken. The gospel is that the same light which judges also recreates. The Word that unmasks sin also speaks the sinner into being again. Preaching "the Word became flesh" means daring to name both realities in a single breath: *You are exposed—and you are forgiven.* That paradox is the pulse of every sermon that lives.

### 3. Reason Redeemed, Not Erased

To preach this Word does not mean despising reason. It means baptizing it. The Logos does not annihilate the mind; he reclaims it for the wonder of faith. That was John's message. The intellect is not crucified; its pride is. After all, the Word who became flesh also became *language*—grammar, syntax, thought itself. Reason is no longer a ladder to reach God but a vessel through which the God-who-descends makes himself known.

The sermon, then, is not anti-intellectual but post-defensive. It does not argue the light into being; it announces that the light *is*. The preacher uses reason not as weapon but witness, shaped by scripture; a hand pointing to what it cannot hold.

### 4. The Trembling Messenger

Every preacher knows the moment before the first sentence is spoken—the thin air of exposure, the sense that one's words, by themselves, are tinder and the Spirit is fire. That trembling is holy. It is the place where arrogance ends and awe begins.

The preacher stands there not as expert or apologist but as herald. He announces what cannot be imagined: that the Creator has entered creation, that the Word has taken on the accents of our broken speech. The sermon is the echo of Bethlehem and Golgotha: heaven translated into human syllables, God refusing to stay abstract.

### 5. The Event That Keeps Happening

"The Word became flesh" is not past tense; it is present reality. The same Word that entered Mary's womb now enters the ears of those who hear. In preaching, that eternal Logos again enters flesh—not in moral example or emotional uplift, but in the Spirit's act of creating faith where there was none.

This is why proclamation can never be mere explanation. When the preacher punctuates word, water, bread and wine with, "For you," something happens. The Word does what it says. The light speaks into darkness, and the hearer who came dead leaves alive. That is not metaphor; it is creation—creation happening again, in real time. For to proclaim God's Word is to recalibrate the cosmos, one heart at a time. The axis shifts, the stars realign, the dust remembers its breath. What was broken is turned toward wholeness, because the same voice that once said *Let there be light* still speaks—and still creates what it commands.

**6. Wonder Restored**

When the ancient world looked at the stars, they saw gods and signs. We have since measured their gravity and mapped their orbits. Yet the preacher's word re-enchants the cosmos, not by reviving superstition but by revealing gift. "The Word became flesh" means that matter itself is loved. The dust is not beneath God's dignity; it is his chosen medium where He stoops to form His own likeness, breathing eternity into what is most transient.

To preach the gospel is to hand the world back to itself, transfigured. Which is to say, the sermon ends where all good preaching begins and ends—at the cross. There the light does not dazzle from a distance; it burns low, close to the ground, where pain and mercy meet—the Creator knowing and having mercy on His world from the inside out. So, the preacher stands, not in triumph but in gratitude, in the quiet astonishment that the light who is Jesus Christ, the light that enlightens, still shines—and even here, even now, the darkness will not overcome it.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE CHRISTMAS LESSONS

## YEAR A

As in Advent, so now in Christmas: the task is to speak the Word that saves. Advent waiting has not ended in sentiment, but in shock. The same God whose coming we proclaimed in judgment now arrives in weakness, in flesh — not to affirm the world as it is, but to enter its ruin and bring light and salvation. The Word made flesh is the Word made vulnerable.

You are about to stand before the manger, and your task is not to decorate it. The Christmas Gospel is not sentiment. It is invasion. "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14) — not as poetry, but as event: God's eternity entering the raw straw of history. The hidden God enters under the sign of flesh and blood.

The manger is not a symbol of innocence; it is the first station of the cross. The child swaddled there is already wrapped for burial. "He shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21) — not by example, but by sacrifice.

If you preach Christmas rightly, the "good news of great joy" will unsettle as much as comfort. The angel's "Fear not" comes only after the shepherds are terrified. The light shines *in* the darkness, not apart from it (John 1:5). The glory of the Lord is born where human peace has failed. To announce that birth is to announce the end of every self-secured world.

It is tempting to make this child safe. But he comes not to adorn the human project but to expose its futility. Herod knew that — which is why the massacre of the innocents follows the singing of carols.

Preach, therefore, the scandal of the Incarnation: God entering our flesh to bear what our flesh cannot, will not. The eternal Word cries, hungers, learns obedience. The infinite becomes infant. The Creator takes the posture of creature so that the lost may be found. This is not moral uplift; it is mercy embodied.

Let your hearers feel the weight of that mercy — not as an idea, but as intrusion. The light that dawns in Bethlehem must burn its way to Golgotha – and to us. The wood of the manger

foreshadows the wood of the cross. The birth that begins in night ends in the darkness of the tomb, and from both shines the same uncreated light.

So, preach Christmas not as escape from the world's sorrow, but as God's descent into it. Speak to those whose nights are long, whose hopes are dim, whose faith is brittle — and tell them: *God has entered this, too – for you.* We sing with joy not because the world is improved, but because the world is redeemed.

And remember: before you preach, as always, we must hear it ourselves. The promise is not only ours to proclaim; it is ours to receive. We, too, stand among the weary to whom the angel speaks: "To you is born this day a Savior" (Luke 2:11). *To you* — not to the deserving, but to the *undone.*

To preach the Incarnation is to stand in defiance of reason itself. It is to declare, with a straight face, that the architect of existence has entered into the crawlspace of His own creation. No syllogism can make that tidy; no doctrine can make it safe. It is a blow struck against the cult of common sense, a lamp lit where philosophy runs out of breath.

To believe otherwise—to domesticate this claim into comfort or moral uplift—is to misread the depth of the world's blindness. For the truth is far starker: men and women do not simply stumble in the dark; they love it. They build their empires by it, trade in it, sing to it. And yet, the Light has come—not because we sought it, but because we wouldn't. The Incarnation is the most unreasonable mercy ever offered, the divine refusal to leave humanity to its own dim understanding.

Therefore, do not ascend the pulpit as a herald of holiday warmth. Ascend it as one astonished by grace and mercy — as one who has seen divine light in the stable's shadow and knows that nothing will ever be the same.

Preach the "tidings of comfort and joy." For in that child's cry the universe is reordered, reborn. And in your voice — frail, human, forgiven — that same Word is proclaimed.

Pastor Mark Anderson

# COMMENTARIES

## The Eve Of Christmas

### Isaiah 9:2-7

### "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."

The prophet's words pierce like dawn through unrelenting night. They speak not of a gradual brightening brought about by human wisdom, but of an unearned intrusion—a great light that *comes upon* those who could not produce it. That is the paradox of Christmas: the light does not wait for the darkness to fade; it invades it. The deeper the night, the more brilliant the radiance.

This is why the Church sings with such strange joy: not because sin has been conquered by human resolve, but because God has chosen to dwell among sinners without first requiring their reform. The child in the manger is the great contradiction—divine holiness wrapped in flesh that will soon bear wounds. His birth does not bypass human failure; it embraces it. Joy rises from the same place despair once lived, and it is no less real for that—it is joy that knows what night feels like. The zeal of the Lord accomplishes this, not the improvement of humankind but the sheer miracle of mercy breaking through our ruin.

### Psalm 96

### "Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth."

Psalm 96 began as a temple hymn celebrating the enthronement of God—the moment when Israel proclaimed that the Lord, not the idols, reigns. It likely accompanied the ark's arrival in Jerusalem, a royal and cultic festival where the people sang a *new song* announcing that creation itself rejoices under the true King. What began as a local liturgy in Zion became a vision of cosmic scope: the heavens, the seas, and the nations all drawn into the joy of God's reign.

When this psalm is read on Christmas Eve, the ancient enthronement song becomes something new, more dangerous and tender. The proclamation, "The Lord reigns," is no longer shouted before

an ark or a throne but whispered over a manger. The glory of God has entered creation not as spectacle but as vulnerability. The One who "comes to judge the earth with righteousness" now comes as a child who will bear the judgment Himself.

The new song is for those who have been astonished by undeserved mercy. Its melody begins in the heart of those who thought all singing was over. It is the sound of creation laughing through tears.

The One who made the heavens has entered His own world as a child. Judgment and joy meet here: the Lord comes to set things right, but His judgment takes the form of mercy. In that paradox, the trembling world finds its rhythm again—the seas, the trees, and the weary souls who had forgotten how to hope. The joy of Christmas is not naïve; it knows the ache of history and the weight of sin. Yet it dares to rejoice because the Judge Himself has chosen to bear the sentence. The world's laughter at Christmas is therefore holy laughter—born not of ignorance but of wonder that such grace could appear in so dark a place.

**Titus 2:11-14**

**"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all."**

God brings salvation. Not offers, not demands - brings. Grace does not descend as an abstract pardon, but as a Person—a child who will grow to bear the world's rebellion in His own flesh. Paul's words stand at the crossroads of law and gospel: the law demands righteousness, grace gives it. And yet grace does not excuse sin; it destroys it by entering its domain and unmasking it from within. The old self dies when it sees that God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves.

This is the scandalous joy of Christmas: salvation does not ascend from human virtue but crashes downward in divine audacity. The God who requires nothing walks straight into the squalor of our need; the infinite squeezes itself into flesh, lungs, and hunger. The holy does not hover above the world—it sleeps in it, breathing the same air that reeks of fear and failure.

Nothing about this is sensible. No tidy theology or moral calculus can account for it. The claim is absurd on its face: that the maker of the galaxies chose to arrive as an infant whose first sermon was

a cry. But if this is true, then every argument against hope collapses. For it means the cracked universe has already been invaded by mercy. Grace has appeared—not as theory but as presence—and once it has touched the dust, nothing, not even our defiance, especially our defiance, can make it retreat.

**Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)**

**"And this will be a sign for you: a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.**"

Only Luke tells of the shepherds. His gospel always begins where human worth runs thin—on the edges of towns, among those who keep the night watch while others sleep. The announcement of God's reign does not rise through the ranks of the righteous; it descends into the rough fields of the ordinary.

The shepherds stand as witnesses to the alien logic of grace: that heaven's first proclamation of peace comes not to priests or kings, but to those who smell of smoke and sheep. The story is not sentiment but theology—God's glory revealed in the world's least likely places.

In their kneeling, the gospel makes its claim: that the light does not wait for the worthy. It shines into darkness simply because that is where God chooses to be The glory of heaven has never shone brighter than in that dim stable. The infinite Word of God, by whom all things were made, now breathes softly among animals and straw. Here is the contradiction at the heart of the Incarnation: omnipotence made helpless, majesty made ordinary. Yet this staggering humiliation is the very revelation of divine joy—the joy that needs no throne because it has found a manger, it has found us.

The angels' song is not sentimental sweetness; it is the thunder of heaven rejoicing over mercy made visible. "Peace on earth" is not an announcement of the world's achievement but God's invasion. The child who cannot yet speak is the Word who will one day silence the Accuser. Christmas joy is therefore never shallow. It trembles before mystery—the laughter that rises only after tears. For into a world of sin, violence, and death, God has come not to judge from afar but to share our night until

it breaks into morning. God creates from the shepherds the first congregation. God's choice is a death blow to human pride. They kneel first because they know the world's darkness.

**CHRISTMAS DAY**

**Isaiah 62:11 — "See, your salvation comes; his reward is with him."**

The prophet's words fall like light on a sleepless city. Jerusalem lies in ruins, but Isaiah tells her to lift her eyes anyway. *"Your salvation comes."* It does not rise from within the city; it arrives from outside. The promise is not that the people will rebuild what they've lost, but that God Himself is on the move.

Here lies the scandal and the hope of Christmas: salvation does not come from human progress or moral reform—it *comes*. It walks toward us. It arrives wrapped in swaddling cloths, not manifestos. The reward God brings is not vengeance or reward as the world imagines it, but mercy—mercy in a body, mercy that learns to cry and breathe and bleed.

For all our striving, God does what we cannot: He crosses the distance. The walls that separate heaven from earth, holiness from sin, are not climbed but breached. The prophet's vision finds its answer in Bethlehem: the Lord has not sent salvation; He *is* salvation. And He will not rest until the ruined city, and the weary soul, shine again with His own light.

**Psalm 97:11 — "Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart."**

Christmas dawn is not gentle—it breaks open the night. The psalmist imagines light flaring over mountains, fire flashing before the Lord, idols collapsing under the weight of His presence. And yet, the gospel tells us that this radiance begins in darkness, in a stable, among the poor and unimportant. The light does not wait for righteousness; it *creates* it.

To say "light dawns for the righteous" is not to celebrate the morally successful; it is to describe what happens when grace arrives. The true righteousness of Christmas is not human virtue but divine visitation. The light that shines is not the glow of our devotion—it is the reflection of mercy on the faces of those who have been found.

Even now, the world trembles under lesser fires—ambition, ideology, war—but the light of Bethlehem burns differently. It exposes rather than destroys, reveals rather than blinds. Its power is its patience. It is the kind of light that refuses to go out, even when nailed to a cross.

**Titus 3:4–5 — "When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done."**

The apostle's sentence is the whole gospel compressed into a few words: *God's kindness appeared.* Not an idea, not a moral code, but an appearance—a life. The Word did not arrive to refine the righteous but to rescue the wrecked.

This is the collapse of every religious ladder. God's salvation does not rise from below; it descends from above. It is not earned but given, not achieved but bestowed. The grace that saves is not our offering to God but God's intrusion upon us.

And yet the verse refuses sentimentality. The kindness that appears is not indulgence—it is rebirth. "By the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit," Paul says. This mercy does not confirm us as we are; it washes, baptizes, recreates us. The manger leads to the font, and the infant to the risen Lord who still makes all things new.

So Christmas is not the annual reassurance that humanity is doing better. It is the confession that we could, will not, save ourselves—and the celebration that Someone has appeared who can.

**Luke 2:11 — "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord."**

The angels do not sing to the powerful, nor to the wise, but to those who keep watch in the dark. The first to hear the gospel are the unclean, the overlooked, the night-shift laborers of the empire. They are not told to go searching for God; they are told that God has come searching for them.

This is the rhythm of the incarnation: downward movement. The Word descends, the glory stoops, and salvation begins in a place no one was looking. There is no fanfare except the voices of heaven breaking protocol to sing to shepherds. The radicality of this picture can hardly be overstated.

The announcement is scandalously specific—*to you* is born this day. Not to the good in general, not to humanity as an abstraction, but to you, the fearful and the unworthy. The Savior arrives not to reform the system but to redeem the heart. And His first throne is a feeding trough, His first worshipers the weary.

This is not a story about innocence—it is about invasion. God has entered the flesh of our failure and made it holy from the inside out. The light that began in Bethlehem will one day blaze from an empty tomb.

**THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS**

**Isaiah 63:7–9**

**"In all their distress He was distressed, and the angel of His presence saved them."**

There is a kind of pain that isolates — that drives us inward, away from others, until even God feels like a distant spectator. The prophet refuses to leave us there. He dares to imagine a God who does not watch our suffering from the safety of eternity but feels it in His own being.
*"In all their distress, He was distressed."*
These are astonishing words. They mean that the Almighty is not the unfeeling "First Cause" of the

cosmos, but the One whose heart breaks with ours. Every wound that human history inflicts, every cry that goes unheard, every lonely prayer — it all reverberates in Him.

The Incarnation is the visible demonstration of this truth. At Bethlehem, God's compassion takes on a face. He comes not as the rescuer who shouts from the shore, but as the one who enters the water and sinks with us. When we wonder why the world remains so torn, it is not because God has withdrawn, but because He has chosen to bear its tearing in Himself.

We may not understand why pain endures, but we know now that it is no longer ours alone. The Word of His presence — the child of Bethlehem — is God's answer to the loneliness of the world. Emmanuel. God with us.

**Psalm 148**

**"Let all creation praise the Lord."**

The psalmist continues the theme: that creation itself is a great symphony of praise. The stars sing their courses, the sea murmurs its psalms, the mountains stand like silent choirs. And yet, this music has been muted by our estrangement. The harmony has broken.

Christmas restores the missing voice. The One through whom all things were made becomes part of His own creation. The music that was once only background to our busy striving now breaks forth again as melody — a child's cry that gathers the whole earth into song.

To praise God is not to pretend that suffering has vanished; it is to recognize that even the wounded world still belongs to its Maker. The joy of the psalm is not triumph but trust — the quiet confidence that the Creator has entered His creation, and therefore nothing is finally lost.
We are invited to join this chorus — not because life is simple, but because grace has touched its depths. Every tear becomes a note in the greater song. Every act of love, every word of mercy, becomes witness to creation's long-awaited promise that harmony will be restored.

**Hebrews 2:10–18**

**"He was not ashamed to call them brothers."**

That single line could heal a lifetime of shame. We spend so much of our existence trying to make ourselves presentable — to others, to God, even to our own conscience. We dress up our guilt in good behavior, our insecurity in competence, our fear in piety. But the message of Christmas, if we are honest enough to hear it, is that God has come precisely to those who cannot make themselves presentable.

"He was not ashamed to call them brothers."

That is the miracle — not that God became human, but that He became *our* kind of human. The kind who grows tired, who weeps, who knows rejection and betrayal. He did not stand at a safe distance from the wreckage. He walked into it and called us His family.

When we feel too soiled for grace, too far gone for hope, this is the word that should echo in us: He is not ashamed. He enters the dark corridors of our hearts, where even we hesitate to go, and there He speaks our name.

Salvation is not escape from the human condition; it is its healing from the inside. The child in the manger begins the long descent toward the cross — a journey that will end where all our shame converges, and where it will be finally undone.

**Matthew 2:13–23**

**"Out of Egypt I have called my son."**

Christmas quickly loses its glow when we read on. The story turns into flight, fear, and lamentation. The holy family becomes homeless. Mothers weeps for their children. And God — astonishingly — does not intervene. He flees with them into the night.

This is the point where many lose faith. What kind of God hides in Egypt while innocents die in Bethlehem? But that is the scandal of divine love: it will not coerce history. The child is not spared the world's danger; He carries it.

What collapses here is the illusion that faith will eliminate the troublesome world. For years we may have believed that God's nearness should make the world gentler, that prayer should draw a circle of

safety around the faithful. But the Christmas story refuses that comfort. The same God who split the heavens with angelic light now vanishes into the dark with a frightened family, while blood flows in Bethlehem.

It is almost unbearable to imagine: the Almighty becoming a fugitive. The child who is "God with us" running for His life, while mothers cry in anguish. If that is how God acts, then our tidy theology must tremble.

And yet, this is the trembling that redeems. For once the walls of smug certainty fall, what remains is not despair but a deeper kind of trust — the kind that can only be born when every false security has failed. We discover that faith is not the conviction that everything will go well, but the confidence that God will not abandon us even when nothing goes well.

The God who hides in Egypt is the same God who will hang on the cross. Both moments reveal love's strange logic and timing: He saves not by control, but by communion; not by avoiding our pain, but by entering it to its depths.

If this story shakes our certainties, it is because it asks us to trade them for something better — not an unbreakable system of belief, but an unbreakable relationship. It leaves us standing before the mystery of a God who refuses to reign from a distance, who lets the world's cruelty touch Him, and yet carries within Himself a light no darkness can extinguish.

That light still moves through history's ruins, quietly and persistently — knowing exactly where each of us fled.

Even in exile, the promise persists: "Out of Egypt I have called my son." The story of salvation begins again — not in triumph, but in vulnerability. The path of the Redeemer winds through every human valley: fear, displacement, loss.

It is tempting to wish for a safer God, one who guards us from the world rather than joining us in it. But safety is not salvation. The Christ who escapes to Egypt will one day hang upon the cross — and by that descent He will draw the whole world home. The angels' song has not fallen silent; it has simply changed its key. It is now sung by refugees, by those who mourn, by those still searching the

night for a glimmer of light. The same light that fled to Egypt still finds its way into our darkness — quietly, persistently, as though it knows the way by heart.

## THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS

### NUMBERS 6:22–27

**"So they shall put my name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them."**

To bless, in the language of Scripture, is not to offer a wish but to bestow a reality. When the Lord places His name upon His people, He does not merely call them *His*—He gives them His own presence. The name of God is not a label; it is an intrusion. It marks the sinner with the unbearable proximity of holiness.

The benediction, then, is not a sentimental farewell at the end of worship. It is the dangerous act of divine claiming. "The Lord bless you and keep you" means: *You no longer belong to yourself.* The face that shines upon you will expose everything you hide; the grace that lifts you will also crucify your pride. The name placed upon us will finally drive us to the One who bears it fully—the name that will one day hang above a dying man: *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.* There, the blessing and the curse are spoken as one.

### PSALM 8

**"What are human beings that you are mindful of them?"**

The psalmist stands beneath the night sky, crushed by its vast indifference. The stars glitter with serene power; the wind sings of transience. Against such immensity, human life appears absurd. The tragedy is that the Church, standing before the same night sky, too often rushes to close its mouth before the silence can speak. Rather than letting the abyss have its say, it fills the dark with slogans and certainties—as if people were frightened children needing reassurance rather than truth. The

psalmist's awe has been reduced to sentiment; the question *"What are human beings?"* becomes a prelude to moral instruction rather than astonishment.

Modern people know too much to be comforted by that. They live beneath galaxies whose light began before language, and yet they are told to be impressed by arguments about design. The real scandal is not that the universe is vast and impersonal—it's that religion keeps pretending it isn't. The very text that trembles with wonder is used to prop up certitude. The result is neither faith nor reason but a pious denial of both.

If the Church had the courage of its own Scriptures, it would stop defending God and start listening again to that unbearable silence from which all true praise must rise. The night sky needs to be entered, as the psalmist entered it—with terror, reverence, and the faint hope that the dust itself is remembered.

And yet—it is precisely the frail creature, the dust that breathes, that God remembers.

"You have crowned them with glory and honor," he writes, but that crown is paradoxical. It is the glory of being *looked upon* by God, not the glory of greatness. The cross reveals this mystery in its starkest form: the Son of Man crowned with thorns, the ruler of all reduced to the broken image of His creatures. To be human, it turns out, is not to rise above creation but to bear its suffering in faith. The stars praise by shining; we praise by bleeding. And when we do, the heavens are no longer silent—they echo with mercy.

**GALATIANS 4:4–7**

**"God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law."**

The apostle's sentence is an entire theology in miniature: *born of a woman, born under the law*. The Word does not descend in purity; He enters the tangled inheritance of human flesh, the endless cycle of promise and failure. He becomes the child of history's womb and prison at once.

To redeem those under the law means to expose the absurdity of trying to save ourselves. The Son takes our place under the very demand that condemns us—and fulfills it, not by performance, but by dying. Adoption is therefore not the graduation of the moral; it is the resurrection of the condemned. We cry "Abba!" not because we have proven ourselves as God's children, but because the Son has carried us home. The freedom of the gospel is not autonomy but belonging: the liberty of those who no longer need to pretend they are gods.

**PHILIPPIANS 2:5–11**

**"He emptied himself."**

The divine humiliation is not a temporary disguise; it is the revelation of who God has always been. To empty oneself is not to lose divinity, but to display it. The cross unmasks the true majesty of heaven: the power that refuses power, the glory that stoops to wash feet.

This mind, the apostle says, is to be among us. Yet no exhortation could be more impossible. We do not naturally bend downward; we climb. We hoard our worth and call it faithfulness. But the Christ who became servant did not ask permission—He invaded our upward grasp and broke it open. His exaltation is the Father's declaration that there is no god but this crucified one. Every knee bends not before a conqueror, but before a love that went all the way down.

And here lies the distortion that can be imposed by those who claim to speak in the name of this Christ: the revelation of abasement is turned into a pageant of triumph. The figure who emptied himself—who refused the ladder of power, who chose the downward path into our ruin—is routinely pressed into service as the very symbol of authority and domination. The cross, meant to expose the absurdity of all divine pretensions, has been polished into a badge of privilege and worn like a medal for moral achievement.

If this story means anything, it is that God does not *win* in the way we wish Him to. The entire enterprise of the faith was to show that the divine is not enthroned above human suffering but entangled within it—that glory is not conquest but compassion carried to the point of death. And yet the Church, with tireless ingenuity, has managed to transform this undoing of religion into the

most successful religion of all. It preaches humility while constructing empires, proclaims itself servant while enthroning bishops, worships the one who washed feet while ensuring that its own are kissed.

Modern people sense the contradiction long before theologians admit it. They live in an age allergic to hypocrisy, and they are right to gag on the sanctimony of those who invoke a crucified God while craving success and applause. What the world rejects in "organized religion" is not the message of the scandal of the cross. More often than not they cannot heart it over the noise the church makes in its place.

What the world often turns away from is not the message of the cross—it's the racket the church makes to drown it out. The cross, if anyone could still hear it, is the most subversive sound ever uttered in human history: the cry of divinity stripped bare, nailed down, and refusing revenge. But that cry has been buried under centuries of religious static and self-importance.

People have been shouted at for so long by pulpits and creeds that they no longer expect to encounter anything true beneath the noise. The Church keeps insisting on being heard but it mistakes amplification for authority, performance for proclamation.

If the text is true—if God has indeed emptied Himself into our flesh, into our failure—then the trembling is not shame but astonishment. The altar, the pulpit, the prayer—all stand not condemned, but redeemed from their own pretense. For in that descent, God has not merely exposed our vanity; He has forgiven it. The silence that follows is not the silence of despair, but the stillness of mercy received.

The gospel does not call us to rid ourselves of the old lust for significance; it announces that even this has been gathered up into the compassion of the Crucified. He has taken our posturing, our pride, our need to be right—and made them the very place where grace does its work. Theology itself is not abolished but reborn, no longer as defense or performance, but as confession.

The cross does not hang over us as accusation; it hangs before us as absolution. What was once a logo of our religiosity becomes the living sign of God's unrelenting self-giving: the Word that refuses to be silenced, the love that refuses to let go. Every sermon, every sacrament, every

whispered prayer begins again there—in the scandal that has become our only hope: that God, having stooped so low, will not rise without us.

**LUKE 2:15–21**

**"And at the end of eight days, he was called Jesus."**

It is one of the strangest and most offensive turns in all of Scripture: divinity begins not with thunder but with a whimper. The shepherds, those night-shift laborers of no account, stumble into a barn and meet the collapse of every religious and philosophical dream of grandeur. Here is not the *idea* of God, but God Himself, unable to lift His own head. The scandal of the Incarnation is not simply that the infinite becomes finite, but that the Holy One consents to the helplessness of an infant—to dependence, exposure, the need to be held.

For the theologian of glory, this is an insult to reason; for the preacher of grace, it is the whole gospel. The same God who carved Sinai's law now submits to diapers. The law cuts its maker, and He does not resist. What kind of deity allows Himself to be wounded by His own command? The only kind who loves the lawbreaker more than His own dignity. This is not divine theater—it is divine dereliction. Heaven's power is spent, not displayed.

And yet, one cannot help but notice the biting irony: while we debate proofs of God's existence, He has already come—too small to see, too poor to matter, bleeding before He can speak. The name "Jesus" is both declaration and diagnosis: *the Lord saves*—which is to say, we do not. The Church forgets this at its peril. It builds monuments to a child who owned nothing, argues endlessly about the mysteries He never explained, and preaches triumph where He promised a cross.

The preacher who dares to name Him rightly must do so with trembling, for this is not a name that flatters; it unmakes. To invoke "Jesus" is to summon the end of all pretense, the death of self-sufficiency. Every syllable is soaked in the blood of the eighth day, the sign that God has bound Himself to our wound.

Here, then, is the method of salvation: not ascent, but descent; not persuasion, but incarnation. The cradle and the cross are carved from the same wood. The first cry of the newborn is already an echo of *"It is finished."* And if that sounds like folly—well, it is. But it is the kind of folly that saves the world.

## THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

### Jeremiah 31:13 — "I will turn their mourning into joy."

Jeremiah dares to sing while the smoke of exile still hangs in the air. The people have not returned home; the ruins are still visible. Yet the prophet insists that joy is already on its way—not because the world has improved, but because God refuses to leave His people where they are. The miracle is not that the sorrow is forgotten, but that it is transformed. The same tears that watered the soil of captivity become the rain that softens the ground for renewal.

This is how divine comfort works. God does not wait until we have stopped crying; He meets us in the middle of the sob. The path to joy runs through lament, not around it. The Holy One gathers the scattered, leads them home, and makes of their weeping a strange kind of praise. The cross will later complete this promise—mourning turned to joy, death turned to life, not by denial but by divine participation. God does not erase history; He redeems it.

### Psalm 147:15 — "He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs swiftly."

The psalmist looks at frost and storm and sees not chaos but obedience. Every gust, every thaw, every change of season answers a command that still moves across creation. The Word runs swiftly, but humanity alone resists the rhythm of divine order; our hearts freeze long after the snow has melted.

And still God speaks. The Word that drives the weather now runs another course—through the pages of Scripture, through the lives of the forgiven, through the fragile speech of the Church. The

same voice that governs the cosmos stoops to call each of us by name. Divine command has become divine companionship. The winter of the heart yields, not to human warmth, but to the Word who keeps running toward us until even our silence begins to thaw.

**Ephesians 1:4 — "He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world."**

Before there was sin to forgive or merit to measure, grace had already decided. God's "Yes" precedes every human "No." This is not the grim determinism of fate but the jubilant freedom of mercy. The choice is not about exclusion; it is about belonging—about a divine intention so ancient that our failures cannot undo it.

To be chosen in Christ is to discover that life itself is rooted in grace, not in achievement. Faith is not our decision for God but our awakening to the decision He made for us. Baptism's certain promise. The believer's "amen" is the echo of an eternal decree. From this follows everything else: forgiveness that cannot be revoked, redemption that costs God His blood, hope that outlives despair. We were destined not for performance but for praise—the astonished gratitude of those who realize they were loved before they knew how to ask.

**John 1:14 — "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."**

Here theology kneels. The infinite becomes particular, eternity takes on time, the Creator breathes the air of His creation. The Word does not hover above history; He steps inside it, trading omnipotence for hunger and fear. In the beginning, God spoke the world into being; now He speaks Himself into it.

This is not divine disguise but divine solidarity. Every human limitation becomes a place where God chooses to dwell. The glory John speaks of is not spectacle but self-giving—the radiance of a love that descends rather than ascends. Grace and truth meet, not as abstractions, but as a person who refuses to lie about our condition and refuses to stop loving us anyway.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness, though it still howls, has lost the argument. The manger is already the shape of the cross; the infant's cry is the same voice that will one day say, "It is finished." To confess that the Word became flesh is to believe that God will never again be without us—that the mercy once wrapped in swaddling cloths still walks among us, turning mourning into joy, winter into thaw, and flesh into the dwelling place of glory.

## KEY GREEK TERMS IN THE CHRISTMAS GOSPELS

### Christmas Eve / Midnight: Luke 2:1–20

**δόξα – doxa ("glory")**

When the shepherds are wrapped in "the glory of the Lord," they are not witnessing spectacle but being drawn into the radiance of humility. *Doxa* here is not the shine of heaven but the shimmer of straw, not triumph but tenderness. True glory is not what dazzles the eyes but what undoes the heart. It is God's own majesty willingly confined to a manger.

**εὐαγγελίζομαι – euangelizomai ("to announce good news")**

The angels come to preach and sing, not argue. The Word comes as proclamation, not persuasion. The gospel is not a possibility waiting for our agreement—it is an announcement that reality itself has changed. The child is born; the verdict is grace. Every attempt to manage, soften, or market this word of good news only shows how little we believe it.

**σημεῖον – sēmeion ("sign")**

The sign is absurdly ordinary: a baby, poor and vulnerable. The old symbols of power—thrones, armies, miracles—are displaced. God writes His signature in weakness. The only way to recognize Him is to be brought low enough to see.

### Christmas Day: John 1:1–14

**λόγος – logos ("Word")**

The eternal reason behind all things has become not a doctrine but a voice, and that voice now speaks in our own accent. The divine Word does not float above the world in cold perfection; it enters our syntax of confusion and fear. Every sermon since then is but an echo of that first divine syllable made flesh.

**σάρξ – sarx ("flesh")**

This word is the scandal and the gospel in one. *Sarx* does not mean ideal humanity; it means our tired, sweating, mortal humanity. God has put His heart where ours break. From now on, there is no corner of creation—no grief, no grave—that is godless.

**σκηνόω – skēnoō ("to dwell, to pitch a tent")**

He tabernacled among us—pitched His tent in the dust. He did not stay in heaven waiting for our ascent; He moved in next door. The holy presence that once dwelt behind curtains now sits at our tables, tastes our tears, and sanctifies the common air we breathe.

## The Holy Name Of Jesus: Luke 2:15–21

**ὄνομα – onoma ("name")**

To name is to claim. When the child is called *Jesus*—"YHWH saves"—God commits Himself to the human condition irrevocably. The Name is not an ornament; it is a vow. Every time we speak it, we confess that God's identity in Jesus is bound forever to our rescue.

**Ἰησοῦς – Iēsous ("Jesus")**

This name carries within it the whole gospel: not "the Lord demands," but "the Lord saves." The blade that cuts Him on the eighth day marks the beginning of a salvation written in His own blood. Before He preaches, before He heals, before He dies—He is already what His name declares.

**νόμος – nomos ("law")**

The law that once demanded obedience now encounters its fulfillment in the flesh of its own giver. The covenant is renewed not by command but by grace. The divine lawgiver submits to His own ordinance, so that no word of condemnation is foreign to God's mercy.

## First Sunday After Christmas, Matthew 2:13–23

**ἀναχωρέω (anachōreō – "to withdraw, flee")**

The word that carries the story forward in Matthew's gospel is not *to conquer* but *to flee*. The holy family's first steps are not triumphal; they are hurried, fearful, hidden. In this verb—*anachōreō*—God teaches us a truth the world has forgotten: salvation often begins in retreat.

Joseph does not fight Herod; he runs. And in his running, the fragile Christ is preserved. The kingdom of God begins, not with defiance, but with trust that sometimes obedience looks like escape. The Savior of the world is smuggled out of it before He can even walk.

**πληρόω (plēroō – "to fulfill")**

Matthew's favorite verb, here denoting not prediction-and-proof but revelation-through-paradox. God fulfills prophecy by subverting expectations: the Messiah's path to glory runs through exile. We often think fulfillment means completion, proof, or satisfaction—as though God were ticking off a checklist of predictions. But in Matthew's gospel, *plēroō* means something deeper: God filling human history with Himself, flooding its cracks and contradictions with unmanageable mercy.

It is a divine irony: the God who once led Israel out of slavery now enters Egypt Himself. What had been the land of bondage becomes the shelter of salvation. This is how prophecy is fulfilled—not by logic, but by love that rewrites the story from the inside out.

**καλεῖν (kalein – "to call, name")**

To speak of God's *call* is to speak of the Word that acts—the Word that does not merely inform but creates the very reality it names**.** In Scripture, divine speech is never commentary; it is command and creation in one breath. "Let there be light," and there was light. "Lazarus, come forth," and the dead man walked. "Follow me," and the fishermen drop their nets. The Word of God does not suggest—it summons.

In this light, God's call (*kalein*) is not an invitation to consider possibilities; it is a verbal event in which God lays claim to existence itself. To call His Son is to declare that work and Word of salvation are completely in God's hands.

## Second Sunday After Christmas: John 1:10–18

### ἐγένετο – egeneto ("became, came to be")

Everything hinges on this small, unassuming verb. The Word *became*. Not "appeared to be," not "seemed like," but *became*—as in, actually entered the messy world. The Creator of galaxies signed His name into the ledger of human pain. This isn't divine playacting; it's incarnation at full cost.

In that single word, eternity crosses into time and finds itself bleeding. The Author doesn't hover above the story, pen in hand, observing the tragedy—He writes Himself into it, line by fragile line, subject to hunger, misunderstanding, and death.

And here is the unbearable grace of it: if God can become what we are, then nothing human is beneath Him—no shame too deep, no wound too raw. We keep trying to climb toward the heavens; while God is more human than we dare to be. That is how creation is spoken again—not by a shout from the clouds, but by a whisper from a manger.

### χάρις – charis ("grace")

This word is the melody that threads through the entire gospel. This is not the mild grace of greeting cards, the polished smile of religion. *Charis* is scandal. It's the shock of discovering that, after all we've done to each other and to ourselves, God still says yes.

Grace is not permission; it's resurrection. It arrives uninvited, shatters the careful moral calculus, and refuses to take "no" for an answer. It does not congratulate the righteous; it raises the dead. It is love with its sleeves rolled up, mercy that smells of sweat and blood.

The greatest insult we give to grace is to make it respectable. It isn't. It never was. Grace means the Holy One has made peace with sinners before they thought to make peace with Him. It is the world's only true surprise—because it should not be, and yet it is.

**ἀλήθεια – alētheia ("truth")**

In this gospel, truth is not a proposition to be argued; it is a person who refuses to lie about love. Truth walks the dusty roads of Galilee, touching what the pure avoid.

We have made "truth" a weapon, something to wield against others, a way of being right rather than being real. But the truth revealed in flesh is not an idea to defend—it is a life that exposes every pretense of holiness.

And this truth is terrible before it is beautiful: that God is not what we expected, that mercy—not power—is ultimate reality, and that death, which we've made the final word, is already a rumor of something defeated.

To face that truth is to stand where the shepherds once stood—overwhelmed, trembling, astonished that the universe's last word is not dead judgment but a newborn's cry. Truth, finally, is not what condemns us—it is what refuses to give up on us.

# SERMONS

## CHRISTMAS EVE

***Text: Isaiah 9:2 — "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."***

There is something brutally honest about Isaiah's sentence.
He does not say, "The people who *sat* in darkness," as though they were resting there for a while.
He says *walked*. The darkness is not a place we visit; it's the path we travel.
It's the long road we know too well—the weary, ordinary way of disappointment and loss, of trying again to believe that life is good and that love endures. We have walked in the darkness for so long we call it light.

And into that long night, Isaiah dares to speak the unearned word:
*A great light has shone.*
Not a flicker of optimism, not the glow of human progress, but the strange light that has no earthly source.
A light that does not begin in us but finds us.

The people who walked in darkness.
That's us.
Not the villains of the story, just the tired travelers who have made peace with the dark.
We have learned how to survive by dim light—
how to work, how to smile, how to say "Merry Christmas" even when the heart is heavy.
We learn to carry on.
But the prophet will not let us rest there.
He speaks of a light that comes *to* those who cannot find it, a grace that shines not because the people deserve it but because God refuses to give them up.

That light is what we see tonight—
the glittering tree, the well-rehearsed carols, point to the impossible humility of God.
The child in the manger is the fulfillment of Isaiah's mad vision:
the light that comes to the dark, the Word that comes to the speechless,

the mercy that enters the broken world not to fix it from above,
but to redeem it from within.

This is what it means to say that God's glory shines in a child: that the Creator has chosen the cradle over the throne, the straw over the marble, the cross over the crown.
The light has not conquered the darkness by avoiding it— it has gone straight through it.

This is the scandal and the comfort of Christmas.
The cross begins in the manger.
The same God who will hang helpless on Golgotha first lies helpless in Bethlehem.

Weakness from first to last. Both scenes say the same thing:
that God's power is hidden in weakness,
that His victory is disguised as surrender,
and that His love is revealed not in the avoidance of suffering, but in His willingness to bear it.

So if you have walked in darkness—if this year has emptied you,
if you are weary of trying to pretend that light comes from within—
then this night is for you.
You are the very one the prophet saw.
You are the one for whom the light has come.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.
It is not a promise for the strong; it is a rescue for the lost.
It is not an invitation to rise above the world; it is God descending into it.
The light shines not because the night has ended,
but because the night now belongs to Him.

So come, you travelers of the dark. Come not to understand, but to kneel.
The child is here, and with Him, the Light that will not go out shines for you.

Amen.

**CHRISTMAS DAY**

***Text: Luke 2:1–20 — "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."***

The morning after the holy night always feels quieter.
The angels have finished their song.
The shepherds have gone back to their fields, still blinking at what they saw.
Bethlehem wakes to another dawn, and the world, it seems, has not changed—
Caesar still reigns, soldiers still march, the poor still gather straw.
And yet—*and yet*—something is different, forever different.
Because in that small corner of the empire,
the Maker of heaven and earth has been born into His own creation.

"For unto you is born this day…"

The message could have stopped at "born this day."
That would have been news enough: a baby, a new beginning, a fragile hope.
But the angel presses on: *unto you.*
That is the miracle.
God's coming is not general but personal, not abstract but aimed straight at us.
Unto *you*—you who can barely hold faith together,
you who carry the long ache of loss or failure,
you who are weary of pretending to be strong.
Unto *you* this child is born.

This is not God's grand display of power.
It is His surrender to His own love and mercy.
The Creator of the stars has chosen to be held, fed, and taught how to walk.
The One who flung galaxies into being now shivers in a manger.
And that is the gospel: not that we must climb up to heaven,
but that heaven has stooped all the way down to us.

The shepherds could hardly believe it.
They were not the kind who got divine invitations.
They smelled of sweat and sheep and exclusion.
They knew how the world worked—how the powerful always stay powerful.
And yet to them, not to Caesar or Herod, the angel appeared.
Glory shone around *them*.
That is how grace always works: it startles the undeserving, it chooses the overlooked,
it brings light where there should only be dark.

And what do they find when they arrive?
Not a throne, not a vision of dazzling fire,
but a young woman, exhausted, an bewildered young father,
and a child who cries like any other.
The sign of God's presence is not majesty—it is need.
He who holds the world now reaches for milk.
He who commands the hosts of heaven cannot yet lift His head.
The Almighty has entered the world as one who must be loved before He will speak.

That is what the theology of the cross already whispers here, on this bright morning.
For this manger leads to another wooden frame,
and this birth points toward a death that will break the power of all our darkness.
Even now, in His mother's arms, the shadow of the cross falls softly across the straw.
Not as tragedy, but as truth: that the God who saves does not stand above suffering,
He bears it.
The light that shines today does not come to banish the night,
but to claim it, redeem it, and make it holy.

So do not fear the ordinariness of your life,
the smallness of your faith,
the weariness of your heart.
They are the very places He chose to inhabit. This is the promise of your baptism. God for you.
For this is the glory of God with us:

that God has bound Himself to our flesh and our failure,
that He has joined you to Christ in baptism that you might be His.

Today, in the midst of everything that still aches, hear the angel's words as if for the first time:
Unto *you* is born this day a Savior.
The Word has become flesh.
The light of God's mercy for you has not gone out,
and it never will.

Amen.

**THE NAME OF JESUS**

***Text: Luke 2:21 — "And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."***

The Word made flesh entered circumcision, the covenant of blood.

This is the first shedding of His blood, the first hint of the cross.
The child who cannot yet speak is already being named for what He will do.
*Jesus*—the Lord saves.
Not "the Lord explains," not "the Lord improves," but *saves*.
Even in infancy, the direction of His life is set: downward, into the human condition; into pain, history, and need.
The Word who became flesh now bears our name and takes on our wound.

The old theologians said the cross is not an interruption in the story of Christmas—it is its fulfillment. Here we see why.
God has chosen not only to become human but to be *marked* as one of us, to enter the same covenant that demanded the blood of every son of Abraham.
This is not sentimentality; it is divine realism.

Grace is not a soft light in the distance—it is the hard mercy that meets us where flesh is torn and pride dies.

The Name of Jesus is not a magic word; it is a verdict. It tells us who God is: the One who saves by losing, the One who rules by serving, the One who lives by dying.
And it tells us who we are: those who need saving, those who cannot name themselves into life.
In that name, all our illusions about self-sufficiency are cut away.

When the angel first spoke His name to Mary, it was already a cross-shaped word.
"Jesus" means *the Lord saves*—but saves from what?
From our own self-made gods, from our relentless attempts to fix ourselves, from the darkness we call light.
To name Him rightly is to admit what we cannot be.
It is to confess that salvation is not our project, but His invasion.

And so the child is named, and in that naming, the whole gospel is announced.
The God who spoke worlds into being now bears a human name,
a name that can be cursed, whispered, and finally prayed.
He will grow into that name.
He will carry it to the cross and into the grave.
And when He rises, He will give it back to us as promise and prayer:
"Whatever you ask in My Name…"

The name of Jesus is the end of every other name we try to make for ourselves—
the successful one, the righteous one, the deserving one.
All of those fade before the one name that finally holds: *Jesus*.
For in Him, God names us again—baptizes us not as failures or frauds, but as His own.

So today we do not merely remember a ceremony in an ancient village.
We remember the God who enters every cut and scar of human life,
who bears your name so that His might be written on you, even as it has been in your baptism.
The cross begins in this moment of naming, and with it, the world's redemption.

Therefore, take comfort: Your name is known. Your wounds are not hidden. The Savior who was named in blood now speaks your name in mercy and forgiveness. And because He bears it, it will never be lost.

Amen.

**FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS SERMON**

***Text: Luke 2:25–35 — "My eyes have seen your salvation."***

Simeon was an old man standing in the temple. He has been waiting so long that most people had probably forgotten what he was waiting for. He doesn't look impressive—just another face in the long line of the devout and the disappointed. But there's something about him: the way he listens, the way he looks at the world as though he's been promised something that hasn't yet happened—and still might.
This is his moment.

When the child is placed in his arms, he doesn't see what we see.
We see a baby.
He sees the end of history, the collapse of the long night.
He looks at this fragile child and says the words no realist would ever say:
"My eyes have seen your salvation."

It's absurd, really.
He's holding a baby who can't even hold up His head,
and he calls Him *salvation.*
That's the scandal of faith, and the wisdom of the cross:
that God does His saving not by power, but by presence;
by crushing evil through carrying it.

Pastor Herb Brokering once said faith is the courage to "sing the song before the dawn."
That's what Simeon does here. He sings before there is anything to see,
because in this child he recognizes the strange pattern of God—
the mercy that hides inside weakness, the victory that comes through surrender.

Simeon holds the same paradox that will one day hang on a cross:
the light of the world, swaddled in fragility. He doesn't deny the darkness; he names it.
"This child," he says, "is destined for the falling and rising of many."
Falling first, then rising— that's how God works.
Death before life, loss before joy, the cross before resurrection.

We keep wanting a gospel that climbs upward— to clarity, to triumph, to strength.
But the gospel keeps moving downward— into vulnerability, suffering, and love that refuses to quit.
That's the way of the manger, and it will be the way of the cross.

Simeon doesn't live to see what becomes of the child. No instant gratification. He lived the long years in faith and that is how his final days would continue.
He dies content, because faith doesn't mean seeing the finish line.
It means recognizing the light even when it's still wrapped in shadow.
"Now let your servant depart in peace," he says.
In other words: *I can die now. I've seen enough.*

Christmas faith is like that— not the bright cheer of having everything explained,
but the deep peace of having heard enough of God's saving Word to trust Him with the rest.
The manger doesn't end the world's darkness; it begins God's answer to it.
And that is enough.

So if you, like Simeon, have been waiting—
the promise is in your arms already.
It's small, maybe trembling.
It doesn't fix the world in an instant.
But it is enough. It as a word. You are forgiven, you are free.

For your forgiveness and your freedom became flesh,
and that flesh has bourne the wounds that heal us all.
The old man's eyes were right: salvation has come, hidden in plain sight.

So take heart, friends in Christ. You may trust the Word that holds you.
And if all you can do is whisper, then whisper though the eyes of faith:
"My eyes have seen your salvation."

Amen.

**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS SERMON**

***Text: John 1:10–14 — "He came to his own, and his own did not receive him. But to all who did receive him…he gave power to become children of God."***

A man once said that the saddest day of the year is when the Christmas lights come down, the wrapping paper's in the bin, and the decorations are boxed up. The season is over. But the church, stubborn as grace itself, keeps singing: *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

It's good that we do.
Because that man was on to something. what happens *after* Christmas is often harder than what came before it. The angel songs fade, and what's left is the long walk of ordinary days—
the world as it is, still full of broken things, still refusing to recognize its Redeemer.
"He came to his own, and his own did not receive him."
That's the line that haunts the season.
It's not just about Bethlehem or Herod—it's about us.
We are the ones who often miss Him when He comes.

And He comes, nonetheless.
That's what Christmas means when the tinsel is gone. Emmanuel. God with us.
He entered the cold, the fear, the long winter of the human heart—
and still, many did not receive Him.

But some did. And to those—He gave power to become children of God.
Notice the language: *power to become*.
It's not about moral improvement or spiritual achievement. It is about becoming.
It's about being given what we cannot give ourselves.

In human terms, "becoming" suggests change, development, progress — one thing turning into another. But when the eternal Word *becomes* flesh, the grammar of being itself is upended. This is not divine evolution or a new phase of existence; it is creation ex nihilo — out of nothing. God does not *adjust* to humanity; He *creates* humanity anew by entering it.
This is the scandal and the comfort of the gospel: God doesn't look for the worthy; He makes the unworthy His own. This is why faith is not a human decision but a divine event. He doesn't find His children; He creates them in the water and the Word—out of doubt, out of failure, out of dust.

That's the theology of the cross in one line. It isn't that God rewards the strong faith of the good, but that He shows up in the lives of those who have no faith left, no light left, no hope but Him.
He is born not in the palace but the stable, not in victory but in vulnerability,
not among those who had room for Him, but among those who didn't.

A pastor once said that faith often feels like trying to see your reflection in a cracked mirror.
You catch a glimpse of yourself, maybe even of God, but it's never clear for long.
That's how it is. The Christian life isn't about keeping the mirror polished; it's about trusting that God can see us through the cracks. That's what the incarnation means: the Word became flesh—
and stayed flesh.
God has chosen to live among the cracks.

So if you find yourself this week wondering where the glow of Christmas went—
if the light feels dimmer, if faith feels smaller— remember: that's exactly where He still dwells.
Not in your strength, but in your need. Not in your certainty, but in your longing.

"He came to his own, and his own did not receive him." But He keeps coming anyway.
He keeps speaking His word of grace and promise into silences that refuse to answer or are too weary to speak. God keeps loving a world that does not love Him back.

That is His glory. And that is our hope.

For the Word has not gone away; He has only gone deeper—into our flesh, into the sorrow, into us. And because He has, we are children still—not by effort, not by merit, but by mercy alone.

Amen.

## CHRIST BREAKS THE DARKNESS

Pastor Mark Anderson

*(Sung to the Tune: "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear")*

Christ breaks the darkness, deep and wide, The Word that spoke the skies;
He enters every shadowed room With light that never dies.
An angel's song, a trumpet sound, Announces what He brings—
Mercy in a manger's cry, And truth in silence sings.

He comes where sorrow hides her face, Where hearts are hard with pain;
He speaks our names in shattered tones And gives them life again.
The night is long, the world is cold, Our faith grows faint and thin;
Yet still His light, unbidden, burns— The dawn begins within.

No throne of gold, no sword of might, No empire crowned in flame—
But cross and cradle side by side, And love that bears our shame.
He breaks the power of fear and guilt, The lie that God is far;
And shows the dark its Master's face— A child beneath a star.

So sing, O weary world, be still, Your God has come to stay;
The Word made flesh now speaks again And drives the night away.
O Christ, our light, our life, our peace, Shine through our doubt and strife;
And break the darkness once for all With love that births new life.