

December 25, 2017  
Christmas Day  
Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-4; John 1:1-14  
Full of Grace and Truth  
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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

How are you known? Beyond your name, what do people call you? Teacher? Pharmacist? Real Estate Agent? Retired? Student? Think about the number of “names” by which you are known: I was called daughter. I was known as niece. I am a sister, mother, grandmother, aunt. I am a cousin, a friend, a neighbor. I am a pastor, I was a bookkeeper and piano teacher. How do the people around you “name” you?

On this Christmas Day, I invite you to consider the unusual name the gospel writer ascribes to Jesus. We are most familiar with the narrative of Jesus’ birth as told by the third evangelist, Luke . . . “and it came to pass that [Mary] should be delivered. She brought forth her first-born son . . . and his name was Jesus.”

The fourth evangelist, John paints a very different picture. This gospel, like the gospel according to Mark, jumps right in at “the beginning”. Mark calls this event “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ”. John takes us back to Genesis 1: “in the beginning”. In the beginning was the Word. The Word that called all of creation into being. The Word – the name by which the evangelist calls Jesus Christ. The Word that is the life and light of all people.

Creator, Word and Spirit.

Present in the beginning is the present light of the world.  
The light that shines in the darkness and is not overcome by it.

We have just passed the longest, lightless day in the Northern Hemisphere.  
We have just passed through yet another frantic season of false hope.  
If only I give (or get) the perfect gift;  
if only I create the perfect Norman Rockwell family gathering;  
if only I had more money, more friends, more time . . . if only . . .

I have to admit my husband and I do not exchange Christmas gifts.  
This year we did not put up any Christmas decorations at home.  
When I admit this, people are horrified!  
“What!! Have you no Christmas spirit?” or  
“You HAVE to decorate – it won’t feel like Christmas, otherwise”.

Well, I also must admit that while I kind of miss the decorations, I don’t miss climbing into the attic and dragging down the bins, unpacking everything, packing away the ordinary décor to make room for holiday kitsch, washing the newsprint off the mugs, chasing the cats away from the tree and ornaments, you get the picture. And then I dread the whole reverse process. It’s just not that fun...

Instead, for the last few years we have focused on Isaiah’s message of peace, good news and salvation.

The long-ago prophet through whom God spoke to God’s people, the messenger on the mountain who says to Zion “Your God reigns!”. Our God reigns eternally! In the beginning was the Word, our God. God was in the world, in a world that did not know The Word. And, the Word became flesh and lived among us. We have seen God’s glory in the Word made flesh. We have seen God’s glory in Jesus Christ, the father’s only son.

How will you name yourself on this Christmas Day and every day for the rest of your life? God gave you a new name, through Jesus Christ.

You are now called “beloved child of God”. Whether you go home this day to a table laden with food, surrounded by family and friends or you sit at a table alone you are known to God. You are loved by God.

You are welcome at this table where we taste and touch and see the glory of God, full of grace and truth. It is through this grace and truth that we are called the children of God, inheritors of God’s grace and truth.

God, give us the grace to know that we cannot create the perfect Christmas. We can only receive it. (Rev. Beth Caulfield)

Thanks be to God! Amen!