

The Nativity of our Lord—Christmas Day
December 25, 2016

Text: John 1:1-14

Theme: “Christmas Vision”

“It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas.” Well, it ought to, it’s now or never. But just what is the look, the vision of Christmas you have in mind? Is it like that Christmas song written by Meredith Wilson?

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas
Ev'rywhere you go,
Take a look in the five-and-ten, it's glistening once again
With candy canes and silver lanes that glow.
It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas,
Toys in ev'ry store,
But the prettiest sight to see is the holly that will be
On your own front door.

Maybe that’s a bit dated. It was written in 1951. Yes, but some of those things do show up in my picture of Christmas. These are sights associated with the season, but surely not the reason for the season. The reason is a world changing, even a cosmos changing event. That’s why we are gathered here even though it’s Christmas. Actually, we are here because it is Christmas. Some churches may choose not meet on this day. Christmas is an observation that started in the church and some decide not to come together as church because somehow it’s interfering with Christmas? The big event is the Savior has been born, the Savior who is none other than God in the flesh.

So we gather. So we celebrate. It is the vision of the baby in swaddling clothes in the manger and it is much more. But the pressure is to make it much less. The darkness would like to see a Christless Christmas, a Christless culture, and a Christless life, which is really no life at all.

Maybe the thought or the reason is, "I just can't see it. It was all too long ago and too far away." This first Christmas was over 2000 years ago. It is the Year of our Lord 2016. Due to a probable error in setting that date, the birth of Jesus may have been more like 2020, 21, or 22 years ago. How can we really expect to know? There was no Facebook, no YouTube, no Twitter, how could anyone have kept up with such things?

How can we have a good picture of Jesus' birth? But lets back up farther, how can we have a picture of the time when NOTHING was the whole picture, the time before time, the beginning? Obviously no one here was there. No one who ever lived on the earth was there (not exactly true as we shall see)! It was just too long ago, and it was so far away, maybe. The universe is vast. You know distances are measured in light years, how far light travels in one year. That's nearly 6 trillion miles per year. Light travels in a vacuum at just over 186,000 mile per second. If we could just convince light to speed up by about 2% it would be right at 6 trillion. Distances are measured in billions of light years. The beginning was long, long, ago, and far, far away.

How can we expect to have a good picture of it all. There are some brilliant minds out there, but how much do we really know? How much

are we even capable of knowing? We find out what we thought we knew we didn't know so well after all.

But let's get back to Christmas. What did that first Christmas really look like? It is usually pictured as being pretty cute and cozy with the manger scene, Mary, Joseph, of course the baby, the animals, shepherds, and often Wise Men who have mysteriously showed up ahead of schedule. But is putting together a picture a shot in the dark? Again, if we go back to the beginning when dark was all there was, maybe not even that. What can we know?

But human beings are hopeful creatures. Has the light not dawned? There is the scientific method. We have learned how to record the observations of our senses in a systematic way in hopes of making some sense of it. We establish patterns, and then make some predictions about what we think will happen next. And in the perfect world we have a way of checking those predictions. Then we try to go backward, try to look back to the beginning when there were no eyes to see, ears to hear, noses to smell, tongues to taste, or fingers to feel.

No doubt we have made great advances in many ways. Just look at the discoveries in genetic understanding, biology, computer applications, artificial intelligence. Can we be designers and shapers of our own destiny? If we just keep after it maybe we will be on top of it. Surely we have a leg up on those shepherds who were keeping watch over their sheep at night, or Joseph and his betrothed who was heavy with child.

Is focusing on the material the best thing to do? Is this not the light part, the part we may understand? If everything is determined by the interaction of material, than what we need to do is figure out all the secrets of the material and its interactions and we'll be in good shape. What does any concept of God have to do with it?

It is easy to point fingers away from ourselves, that's how finger pointing usually works, but we're pretty into the material also. All that material has quite an appeal to our five senses. So why don't we just pursue the stuff? Certainly this is the time of the year when the appeal is made through our senses that we need to have more material. This is the materialism we know. It has been said that materialism is buying stuff you don't need with money you don't have to impress people you don't know (I think that's from Dave Ramsey).

So how does God fit into this material picture? Is it a matter of what God can do for me now, not so worried about that beginning or the ending stuff. How can God make my life better? A little baby Jesus, even a Precious Moments Jesus, can be useful to add at least a little charm to the décor of the room. Jesus is made Christmas size, cute and cuddly. He can bring a smile to my face and then I can put him down, walk away and go on to more material matters. We may suffer from a little selective sensory perception, eyes seeing and ears hearing what the stuff behind the eyes and between the ears determines as desirable to be seen and heard.

But Christmas really changes all this. Christmas shows us the beginning is nearer than we thought. "And the Word became flesh and

dwelt among us.” This is the One who is the Beginning. He is the one through whom all things were made, the source of all material. He was with God, was God, and is God. So maybe we don’t have a leg up on those Shepherds. After all they were the first to hear the good news, good news of great joy for all people, the good news that a Savior had been born, Christ, the Lord! (Luke 2:10, 11) The beginning is too far way, too long ago, but the Beginning has come to us, the timeless One into time. Wow, this is what we remember at Christmas.

It’s He who enlightens, more than that, even the Light. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” (vs 4) God had been shedding some light on the coming light. He did so through the light of the words of those prophets in days of old that the writer to the Hebrews speaks of. Then came a great shining declaring the imminent coming of the Light, this man from God was a witness to witness about the Light. His witnessing lights up a latter portion of John 1. But again, John the Gospel writer tells us John the man sent from God, was not the Light.

But the Light has come. Yes, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He comes into the world of His own making and yet is not received as the light. The darkness tries to avoid the light, even tries to overcome it. Darkness in all its forms including the prince of darkness battles against it. The powers of darkness put forth their darkness as various shades of light, at least gray. It’s a losing battle. Ultimately it’s a lost battle for the darkness.

The True Light has come. The True Light gives us the eyesight to see our blindness, the vision to see it for what it is, the blindness of sin. The True Light has come that we might know the Light of life. He was conceived. He was born. He would grow, mature, go about His business, really His Father's business. He fulfills that business. "He came to His own and His own received Him not." So writes John. It seems like an understatement. This little baby wrapped in swaddling clothes will be the naked man dying on the cross. It's His to do and He does it. He does it for us, for you, for me, for all. The Word made flesh, God made man and remaining God is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Christmas vision is a picture of love, sacrifice, and salvation. We have been given the picture from those who were there. It comes to us through those who saw Him, heard Him, touched Him, tasted food with Him at meals, smelled the aroma of pure nard used to anoint Him at one such meal. They saw, heard, tasted food with, and touched, the man crucified, dead, and buried, now risen and living. They were commissioned by Him to be bearers of the light concerning the Light of Life. They were to shed light on sin calling to repentance and shine the light on Him for cleansing from that sin. They would do all this through baptizing and teaching until the end of the age. It's their on going witness that we proclaim even now.

We can't go back to the beginning. The Beginning has come to us. It's a new now, the now of being His child, serving Him as we walk after Him. It's a wow now, a full now, full of meaning, direction, and joy. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Beginning has come to our

now and will be with us to the end. The Beginning among us means a blessed, never ending end. God has come to be one of us and live with us. That's what Christmas looks like. For Jesus' sake. Amen