



CHRISTMAS

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

Tuesday, December 25, 2012

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Lection – John 1:1-14 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (v. 2) He was in the beginning with God. (v. 3) All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being (v. 4) in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. (v. 5) The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (v. 6) There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. (v. 7) He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. (v. 8) He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. (v. 9) The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. (v. 10) He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. (v. 11) He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. (v. 12) But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to

become children of God, (v. 13) who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. (v. 14) And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

On Christmas, the shopping mobs in the malls may sing “Santa Claus is coming to town” but the real good news on Christmas is that God comes to save the town and the whole world. Christmas is the time when people rejoice that the promised Messiah has come—God comes to us in the human flesh of Jesus Christ. Christmas asserts that the incarnation of God is a reality. This incarnation sparks celebration in many churches. The reason for rejoicing is that God was not so high that God would not stoop low to save us. God is with us with glory, grace, truth, life, and light.

Worship services on this day should focus on that theological reality. Yet we must be spiritually sober in acknowledging that the birth of Christ occurred in an unfriendly world or a world that did not necessarily want to know him. Because of this, Christmas provides a gracious opportunity for testimony in which Christians testify and witness to the goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word, in the land of the living.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: John 1:1-14

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

When my mother was young, she and other children were not allowed to be in the same house in which someone was giving birth. She was sent to some relatives' home until the morning when the baby would be born. I'm not quite sure why she was sent away but when she returned home, she would see the baby and be told that a ship delivered the baby or that the baby came from a pond! Regardless of the source of the baby, my mother could see that the baby was real, in the flesh, living among them. She could testify to his/her grace and the new life in her midst in her family. She could testify to how the baby brightened up, enlightened the home. She could testify to the glory of God she saw in the form of a baby.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

Like this testimony about the new life that had entered the world, John testifies to the light (v. 7). Light is a repeated theme in this passage (vv. 4-5, 7-9; cf. Gen 1:3-4; cf. John 3:18-19, 8:12, 9:5, 12:46; cf. Is. 9:2, 42:6-7, 60:1-3). It is a “light of all people” (v. 4). It is a light that shines in darkness (v. 5). It is a “true light, which enlightens everyone” (v. 9). It is a light that comes into the world (v. 9). This light is none other than Jesus Christ (v. 17). He is brighter than any darkness (v. 5) because we hear later in the book of John that Jesus is the “light of the world” (John 8:12). He illuminates all of creation as the Word who was “in the beginning” (v.1; cf. Genesis 1:1).

The Word (v. 1), the *logos*, is the divine principle of reason that gives order to the universe. The Word was God and “all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came

into being” (v. 3). The Word, Jesus Christ, is the cosmic creator. He is high as divinity but still stoops low into humanity. The Word “became flesh and lived among us” (v. 14) to save us.

But what John demonstrates is that not everyone realizes their need of salvation. Not everyone sees the light even when it shines brightly. “The world did not know him” (v. 10) but even when he goes to “his own” “his own people did not accept him” (v. 11). What we have is really a story of rejection because not everyone can handle the truth (v. 14). Not everyone wants to hear that racism still permeates U.S. societal systems and structures. Not everyone wants to see the light of the truth that we do not live in a post-racial environment. Not everyone wants to talk about the “New Jim Crow”¹ prison industrial complex. When that Word is spoken into the world, many still do not accept this truth because not everyone can handle the truth. The Word may be right in front of them but yet they still do not see the truthful “flesh.” Thus, Christmas is also about the rejection of the light, the Word, Jesus the Christ. “Joy to the world the Lord is come” is not a joyous announcement to everyone’s ears.

In the historical context of the book of John, there is a great deal of conflict between synagogue authorities and the Jewish Christian community. There is significant tension over the notion that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God, which John the writer preaches (John 20:31). One might think that not being in darkness (v. 5) is a gift of grace, but for some people darkness is all they have ever known. It is normative because being in a storm is the norm for them. Everyone doesn’t understand calm or the light. Thus, Christmas becomes an opportunity to testify to the light that has come into the world for the world.

Christmas becomes a time to prepare our families and communities for the birth of the Word, even while knowing not everyone wants to hear and receive this Word of God. Some just want to shop until they drop and praise the gods of commercialization. But we should also recognize that there are those who do receive him and believe in his name (v. 12). Not all reject the enfleshed Redeemer. Some do receive him and by doing so receive power (v. 12). Those who accept the light know him and recognize that he “lived among us” (v. 14; cf. Exodus 25:8; Ezek. 37:27; Zech. 2:10-11) and lives among us. Christmas says that God wants to get with us to show how much God loves us. It is important to realize that the one who lives among us comes to us with life (v. 4). The incarnate Word gives life as he comes into the world. The world did not give it and the world can’t take it away. Christmas is about life in and from God in the person of Jesus Christ. Because we know that there are those who will accept him, our task is to be a living witness just like John (v. 7). Can I get a witness?

Celebration

God comes in the flesh whether people accept or reject him. He comes into the world to bring light and to enlighten. He became one of us, human, to save us, to give us life, his life, abundant life, eternal life, life everlasting, infinite life, life that no one can kill. Jesus is the light and life of God. Can I get a witness?

Descriptive Details

The descriptive details include but are not limited to:

Sounds: John testifying to the light; and

Sights: The Word with God made flesh; things coming into being through the Word; light shining in darkness; light coming into the world; people rejecting the light/Word/Jesus; the Word becoming flesh; the Word's glory.

III. Further Reading

Forbes, Bruce David. Christmas: A Candid History. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007.

Note

1. Alexander, Michelle. The New Jim: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness. Reprint Edition. New York, NY: The New Press, 2012.