

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Story: Chapter 22
Pastor Dave Scherrer - March 4, 2012

Today we are going to have Christmas in March. What a good idea! We have been making our way through *The Story* and now we are breaking into the New Testament. Did you know that it has been 400 years since we last talked?!

The Persians help the land of Israel for another 100 years after the Hebrew exiles came home to Israel, a time of relative peace. Then the Greeks under Alexander the Great defeated Cyrus the Great and the Greeks held Israel for about 150 years. He required that Greek culture be promoted in every land that he conquered. As a result, the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek, becoming the translation known as the Septuagint. Most of the New Testament references to Old Testament Scripture use the Septuagint phrasing. Then the Egyptians and Syrians took over when Al the Great died and that was a time of terrible darkness for the Jews. Antiochus Epiphanies in 167 BC overthrew the rightful line of the priesthood and desecrated the temple, defiling it with unclean animals and a pagan altar to Zeus. This spurred the revolution of the Maccabees in 166 BC, who had a remarkable victory over the occupying armies, an event still celebrated by Jews every December called Hanukah. After about 100 years of self rule the little city state of Judah was occupied by the Romans. And that takes us up to the time of Christ.

Throughout our study of the Old Testament we have seen that it has been pointing all along to the story of Jesus and His advent into our world to save us from our helpless condition and restore our story to one where we can enjoy this unbridled intimacy with God through Jesus Christ.

And when you start off in the New Testament we always think of the birth of Christ; Christmas. Around here we decorate with trees and lights and wreaths. We do all kinds of Christmas fun with music and drama.

Maybe like this one: Children's Christmas Pageant Video

People have been turning Jesus away for a long time.

There was no room in their heart and so they turned him away and I want to get back to that in a bit.

But there is another Christmas story in the Gospel. Most Bible scholars believe that the Gospels of Mark and Matthew and Luke were all written before the book of John. So that when John got to write his account of Jesus' life and work and teachings he started out very different than his friends:

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

“And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.”

You'll find that passage on page 309 of The Story or in verse 14 of John's first chapter. Listen to those words again...

“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.”

If only the innkeeper had understood this. If only he had understood that that child who pressed against the womb of Mary was not just another number in the census but that was the Word of God. And we may read too quickly past that title The Word. The Word became flesh. We may appreciate its poetry and its eulogy, but it's really much more than a compliment, especially to the Greek readers for they quickly understood this phrase *logos*, the Word of God.

Several hundred years prior to Jesus, a philosopher by the name of Heraclites lived in Ephesus. He's the one who made that famous statement about the inability of the human being to step into the same river twice, because by the time you do so, and step back into it, the river's changed. And such is the picture of life. It's always moving. It's always changing. But behind it all, he suggested, is the *logos*,

LOGOS

Or the Word, the logic. L-o-g-o-s *logos*, like l-o-g-i-c *logic*. The reason. The rationale. He said, summing up what the Greeks understood of this overarching concept, “*logos* is the omnipotent wisdom by which all things are steered.”

***“Logos is the omnipotent wisdom by which all things are steered.”
Heraclites of Ephesus***

When I was in NYC working with inner city youth and if I said something particularly intelligent, Wendel, my friend from Harlem, might say “word” – that was his way of saying, “What you have just said is truth of very truth.” They just said it better! Word or Logos - the same thing, a very Greek idea.

In fact the Greek philosopher Plato made Logos famous. He once offered this possibility to a group of philosophers: First, he actually said, “it may be that someday there will come forth from God a Word, a Logos, who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain.”

And now John, the Gospel writer, who wrote his Gospel after Matthew and Luke had written theirs, says, “You know really the beginning of all creation was with the Logos, the Word of God, who has become flesh.” Let's look at those words again:

John 1:1-2

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Here's where the Hebrew readers perk up: “In the beginning.” That phrase appears twice in the first two sentences. “In the beginning. In the beginning.” Hmmm, I have heard that phrase before. Sounds like the first phrase to another book. Somebody help me? Genesis!

Genesis 1:1a
In the beginning . . .

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” And so this Jewish student – a student of the Torah – who has read the Torah, listened to the Torah, says, “John, you’re using the very same phrase that was used to begin ‘the beginning’, ‘In the beginning was the Word.’”

John in using this phrase is placing Jesus where? In the beginning! He’s placing Jesus in the drawing room of creation. He’s announcing that the beginning of Christ...well, Christ did not begin in Bethlehem. In fact, the beginning of Christ is non-existent. Christ has been as long as God has been. This is a major statement that John is making. As long as God has been, Jesus has been. In fact, Jesus was the Genesis Word. How did God create the universe? With words. “**And God said,** ‘Let there be light.’ And there was. “**And God said,** ‘Let there be firmament.’ And there was. “Let there be man made in my image.” And there was. And John is saying, “You know who was there saying, ‘Let there be’”? The Word. The Word. This is the voice of Jesus speaking!

Paul the Apostle would later say that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation and that

Colossians 1:17
He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

1 Corinthians 8:6
He is the One Lord, Jesus Christ through whom God made everything and through whom we have been given life.”
The Word became flesh!

Jesus. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. God wrapped himself in flesh complete with teeth and toenails and hair and a couple of kidneys (or one). He became flesh! But he remained God. For in Christ, the fullness of God lives in a human body.

He is not part man and part God. Not half man or half God like the Greek gods. He is at once all man and all God. This is the mystery of the incarnation. Divinity and humanity in one human being. One God. Undiluted. Unbridled. All divine. All human. So divine that he could be born of a virgin; that he needed no one’s assistance in entering a womb. He could be born of a virgin. Remember the conversation between Gabriel, the angel, and Mary, the mother of Jesus? In Luke chapter 1, verses 34 and 35 or in The Story on page 310,

Luke 1:34-35
“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”
The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

What a fitting beginning to the earthly ministry of Jesus! He needed no help to exist in heaven. Do you think He needs help in a journey to the earth? He was divine enough to enter a womb entirely on his own and yet human enough to have no room in the inn. He couldn’t even rank a bed in the Bethlehem Motel 6. His father was so regular, such a ‘regular Joe’ he didn’t have any clout, he didn’t have any cash, he didn’t have any credit. He didn’t have any strings to pull, he didn’t have any friends to call. Jesus, the Maker of the Universe, the One who invented time, the One who gave you the breath that you just took, the One who owns and oversees everything was so humble that his parents could not swing a room at the hotel, even though his mother was third trimester heavy!

How humble is that? Can I tell you how humble that is? Humble enough to understand what you’ve been through this week. Humble enough to understand what kept you awake. Humble

enough to say, "I know what that's like." Humble enough that when an immigrant from Ethiopia prays or a squatter in Brazil offers a plea for help that the Almighty God does not shake his head and say, "I wish they'd get their act together." But he remembers the pain of a hungry belly and the chill of a cold night and he knows what it's like to hear his parents tell the story of a day that they got turned away on the night of his birth.

The Word became flesh; became a human. He entered the very muck and mire of our world and felt to the fullest what it was like to be you and to be me.

For the Greeks, he was the Reason who became flesh. For the Hebrews he was the Creator who became flesh. For all of us he is God who became flesh. And how did the world respond to the God who became flesh? Well, the answer is on page 309 of *The Story*, or in John chapter 1;

John 1:10-11

"He was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."

People have been turning Jesus away for a long time

Look at that. Apparently the innkeeper wasn't the only person to turn Christ away. Others had turned him away and he's certainly not the last to turn Christ away. I'd love to talk to this innkeeper, wouldn't you? I don't want to be too hard on him and he surely gets a bad rap. But we do wonder, don't we? Could you not find room for a mother who is 9 month pregnant? What could his excuse have been? Maybe he said, "It is so crowded in here." I mean, this census has turned Bethlehem into a boom town and there is not an available corner in this entire hotel. It's just too crowded. Besides, this isn't a hospital – it's not a maternity ward – and it's so late. We don't know what time Jesus and his parents showed up. We all think it happened late at night. Maybe it did. Maybe it was a midnight knock on the door and maybe it was so late that the innkeeper had crawled out of bed, walked over and opened the door just an inch or two – enough to peer through and say, "I'm already in bed. Everyone's asleep. It's too late." And in his mind, he thinking, "And you're so common."

If this had been Queen Mary, if this had been King Joseph, if there had been a caravan following them with camels and servants, don't you know he would have thrown the door open. But this is just Joe and Mary, peasants from who knows whatever hit town, come knocking on the door in the middle of the night...they're so common. And it's so late and the world is so crowded.

Our lives, like the Inn in Bethlehem, get very crowded

It's still crowded, isn't it? Your world is crowded. Crowded with demands. Crowded with things you need to do. And crowded with things that you wish you would not have done. Crowded. Crowded with headlines and deadlines and phone lines and long lines. And concern over waistlines. Crowded. The world gets jam packed. Crowded. Schedules full. Itineraries full. Responsibilities full. Anxiety cups full. It gets crowded.

And sometimes Christ comes in the midst of our crowded world and he knocks on the door of our hearts and our response is, "I don't have time." The world is already so crowded. I've got the kids and I've got the job and I've got the marriage, I've got the plan, I've got the degree, I've got all these responsibilities – life is crowded.

And what that innkeeper did not understand, and what innkeepers don't realize even today is that when Christ comes, he does not come to complicate life, but to simplify life. Your life is already complicated enough. And ***it's not the presence of Christ that creates complications, but it is the lack of Christ that creates complications.*** Because when Christ steps into the open heart, when he steps through the open door, he does not come with a list of things for you to do. Somebody told you that and it was wrong.

He does not come telling you to get your act together so he can come in. The reason he comes in is because you can't get your act together.

And he comes not with a list of things for you to do, but yes, he comes with a list of things he's already done! He comes with your sins forgiven because he died on the cross and received the just punishment for every mistake, for every act of rebellion that you and I have ever done. And he comes offering you eternal forgiveness. He comes with your death defeated, turning your grave into just a temporary way station. And he comes with the absolute certainty, not just the possibility, but the absolute certainty of eternal life. Heaven. Forever. With him.

Boy! You talk about something that simplifies life! You get your sins dealt with, your death defeated and your eternal future defined – boy, life takes on a certain clarity. You can handle the 'to-do' list once you've gotten the big things done. So don't tell Jesus, "My life is just too crowded."

He comes and he simplifies life. If the Christ in your heart is not simplifying life, that's not Christ in your heart, because the Christ who comes is the Christ who receives all and he clarifies life. But you have to open the door and let him in.

Revelation 3:20

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

"Ah, but it's so late", someone might say. "It's too late." Not late at night, but maybe late in life, or late in the game. No it's not. No it's not. Even if you've heard the two minute warning in life... it's not too late. It wasn't too late for Abraham. My goodness, he was pushing triple digits, wasn't he when he had his first child? It wasn't too late for Moses. He was already retired and working as a shepherd at age 80 when God called him out of retirement and gave him his ministry. Fruitful years. It wasn't too late for Jonah. Remember, Randy took us through the study of Jonah? He had run from God but God pulled him back in. It wasn't too late for Saul even though Saul persecuted Christians he became Paul who converted Christians. It wasn't too late for Peter who denied Christ. For Thomas who doubted Christ.

The stories of the Bible are stories of people who pushed, it seems to us, the time limits of God, but it was never too late. It's not too crowded. It's not too late. And don't turn Jesus away because he's too common. Some people miss Jesus because they're waiting on something, you know, supernatural, some sign from heaven, or some headline grabbing miracle.

But if the story of Christ teaches us anything, it teaches us that he comes through the common – the common places like Bethlehem, to a common father like Joseph, on the back of a common donkey, in a common manger, in a common stable, to common folks like shepherds, in the womb of a girl so young and common, probably young enough to have pimples, poor enough not to own anything.

When God picks his way of coming, he comes to the common. He comes on common mornings like this one. Common preachers like this one.

Not everyone turns him away, thankfully. A lot of people do. Curiously. But in the midst of the slamming doors, if you listen carefully you can hear the creaking of the hinge – the opening of a door when somebody hears the story of Jesus and his invitation to come into their heart and if they issue this response in return: "Come in Jesus. Yes, please. Come in. Make my heart your home. Excuse its mess, please. Forgive its sin. But, isn't that why you've come? To cleanse and purge, to sweep and wash and to make this shack your home? If you'll have me, my best is yours, and now my heart is your home."

Communion is a table for sinners saved

Past: He has paid for this dinner

Present: He will be with us and it for everyone who has been saved by Christ and has opened the door of their heart to him. Yet there is this one instruction - to examine our hearts . . . Chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians, it was a command to search your heart regarding the poor and the hungry.

Future: when we will sit at the table of the King and enjoy dinner like you have never before enjoyed dinner.