

CHILDREN OF GOD

PSALM 147:12-20
JOHN 1:1-18

A SERMON FOR CHRISTMASTIDE
SUNDAY, JANUARY 4, 2015
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
MARIANNA, FLORIDA
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I suspect that if I preached on the entire good sermon ideas, all of the deep truths and theological concepts found in our text this morning, I would have a sermon for every Sunday of this New Year.

John doesn't tell us the Christmas story in his gospel. He begins with this marvelous theological treatise that brings creation and the incarnation together in one short passage.

John uses the theological language of the Greeks, and of the Essenes, the desert dwelling Jewish scholars of his time, when he writes about Jesus as the *λογος*, the living word, and the light which shines in the darkness.

As the other gospel writers use John the Baptist as proof of the Messianic claims for Jesus, so does John the Evangelist introduce the Baptist, but again, in his unique way, using the light and dark symbolism once again.

One of the saddest, most poignant lines in all of scripture is verse 11, where John tells us that Jesus came to His own people, but His own people would not accept or receive Him.

And verse twelve tells us the amazing truth of the gospel: that to all who receive Jesus, who believe in his name, Jesus gives the power to become children of God.

I learned more than thirty years ago when I was doing a wedding for a couple, one Christian, one Muslim, that the concept of being a child of God is repugnant to the Islamic faith. They refuse to accept the Virgin Birth of Jesus, so that his claim to be the son of God is incomprehensible, and the concept that John puts forth here, that we are born not of the flesh but of the will of man, but of God, is just as hard to understand. Thus, when I tried to explain to the Muslim groom that I believed that we are all God's children, I offended him. Thus, our Lord's Prayer, beginning "Our Father, who art in heaven," is to a Muslim an arrogant and false claim.

So is the concept that the Living Word, the Living God, became flesh in Jesus Christ. Yet that concept, the incarnation, is at the heart of what we believe. We believe, as Christians, that Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of God, and we believe that He was flesh just as you and I are flesh, and that in spite of that Jesus led a perfect sinless life. And we believe that He suffered and we suffered, and He died as we shall all surely someday die, and that He rose again from the dead. And all of that is underlying what John says when he writes that "we have seen his glory the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (Verse 14)

But when Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He did not tell them to pray to the One God and Father of Jesus Christ. He said, "Pray like this: Our Father..." "Our father..."

In the Brief Statement of Faith of our denomination, we are reminded that Jesus called God "Abba", Father. Some have said that "Abba" is more like "daddy" or "papa" than the rather cold and formal sounding "Father", but I'll be content to call God "Father."

I am content to know that I am a child of God. That we are children of God.

In the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which we celebrate today, we commemorate the incarnation of Jesus Christ, that He became flesh and blood even as we are flesh and blood. We remember His death for our sins, the breaking of His body, the pouring out of His blood, for the forgiveness of our sins. And we remember that He rose again from the dead and is ascended into heaven.

In a real sense, this is where we affirm that we are indeed children of God, born not of the blood but of the Spirit, adopted if you will into the family of God. Christ is our brother, so God is our Father. And this is our family meal.

We begin a New Year with a family celebration: a celebration that we are all children of God, that we have One God and Father of us all, as we have one Lord, Jesus Christ, and one faith and one baptism.

Years ago, I knew an old Black woman named Westley, and that is Westley with a "t", not Wesley as in John Wesley the hymn writer and Methodist. Westley would impart words of wisdom to me when we met on the post office steps.

One morning, in the summer, a group of children of her race passed by as we were talking. They were rough-housing, littering, turning over garbage cans, calling each other every foul name and cuss word they could conjure up.

Miss Westley, as they called her, stepped on the sidewalk in front of them and commanded them to stop. They did. She told them to clean up the mess they'd made, clean up their language, because she knew who their mamas were and she'd call them up and tell them to give them all a whipping (only she said whooping) when they got home.

They said, "Yes, ma'am, Miss Westley, and got to it.

She turned to me and said, "The problem with those children is they don't know who their daddy is." She laughed, and continued, "That's the problem with this world. They's too many folks in it who don't know who their real Father is."

I think Miss Westley was right: there are too many folks in this world who don't know that there is one God and Father of us all, and that they have the power to become children of God if they but believe in God's son.

