

See His Glory! John 1:14
Christmas Day 12/25/2011 Pastor Aaron Nitz

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen. The portion of God's Word on which we will focus our attention this morning is the last verse from this morning's Gospel. I'll read it once again: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." In the name of Jesus, dear friends in Christ, what a sight! Perhaps it even takes your breath away. What pictures do you see copied in your mind that just about takes your breath away? I don't know, perhaps it's a beautiful landscape blanketed in a soft, white, clean sheet of snow, trees glistening and sparkling white in the sunlight. Perhaps it's your whole family gathered together around the table to enjoy a happy Christmas meal together. Or perhaps it's a picture of your children or grandchildren with great smiles opening just the gift they wanted. What are the Kodak moments in your life?

We treasure moments like those and file them away in our minds. We like take pictures with our cameras of happy and joyous times with family. We record it on camcorders, fill up photo albums and scrap books. Why? Isn't it partly because we know the moments are going to pass, soon be gone. We do our best to capture times of happiness because those times may soon pass and we want to maybe, perhaps, possibly be able to relive the moment and remember the joy, the happiness, the smiles, the excitement we felt at the time. It doesn't take long and the moment is gone.

Perhaps Christmas is one of those times. Christmas is here...and it's gone. Family and friends and relatives come...and soon they leave. Vacation time comes...and then is soon over with. Even presents and gifts often have a way of soon losing their excitement and being left alone and forgotten about. The snow falls...then it melts. Soon the Christmas trees will find their way out to the curb or back in a box. The Christmas decorations will be packed away and the excitement of the holidays will seemingly wear off. So many things in our lives come and go, don't they? And perhaps what we miss most is the joy and gladness and excitement, the smiles and the laughter, when they're gone.

And perhaps it isn't just special times like Christmas and the holidays. It's our whole lives isn't it? How does one get through life? How do you handle these times of joy and happiness followed by monotony or pain or sadness? We all know what it's like. Something will happen that makes us glad or happy for a time. But sooner or later whatever it was will be forgotten when something terrible happens and we will be filled with grief or sadness. So many ups and downs in life!

Many people remember the happiest day of their lives. Maybe it was your wedding, where you married the love of your life and you were filled with such joy and happiness. But perhaps it wasn't too long after the wedding day when you discovered that your spouse is not perfect or, just maybe, your spouse discovered that you aren't perfect. All of a sudden that which was so happy, joyful, glad turns into a bitter argument, anger, and grief. And it happens all around us, doesn't it? Things will be going well, you get a promotion at work or enjoy what you do, when all of a sudden a co-worker gets on your nerves, work that was once fun turns burdensome and frustrating. Or maybe it's a health trouble. Right when you thought everything was going fine, at the most inconvenient time, you find yourself waiting and wondering at what the doctor is going to say next. These ups and downs of life can really wear on a person after a while and if you've been around for many years, you know all too well what it's like riding life's roller coaster.

So what's the answer to all of this? How do we deal with this constant change, the ups and downs of life, the good and the bad, times of happiness and times of tears?

Perhaps the answer is to live on edge. You've experienced this roller coaster too many times in life. Any good news is taken with a grain of salt. Cautiously guarding the heart. Cautious not to get your hopes up too far lest they be dashed and you have to undergo the pain of having dashed hopes once again. You only allow yourself part joy at Christmas waiting for the bad news to hit, realizing that soon it will be passed.

Perhaps the answer is to have a ho-hum attitude about life. Going about life in a so-so kind of way. A grim outlook on life. Never getting too excited. So we take our pictures and make our memories because we know one day they will pass and there will be times of grief and sadness and perhaps maybe our pictures, scrapbooks, memories can give us a glimmer of happiness in times of sorrow or emptiness.

Is there any reason to be joyful in this world full of hurt and pain, change and decay, ups and downs?

We may not always be happy. Being happy depends upon a circumstance, a present condition. Happiness comes and goes. Many children are happy at Christmas because they got presents that they really wanted and it made them happy.

We live in a world full of sin and we deal with the consequences of sin on a daily basis. We may not always be happy, but we do always have joy.

Less than a year after Harriet heard the news the cancer had taken over her body. On hospice care at home she was confined to a hospital bed waiting to die. Her room wasn't filled with a whole lot of happiness. Any plans her husband and she may have made for a retirement were trashed. There wouldn't be any more times of sitting outside and smelling the fresh air. She wouldn't see a beautiful snow clad landscape again. No more Christmas presents and making happy memories. She wouldn't get to see her grandchildren grow up. Yet, there is this picture cemented in my mind that I will never forget. And it's a glorious one. Sitting beside her bedside I was watching her as she heard once again the message of her Savior, one could never forget the certain smile come across her face. Here's someone we may think had nothing left still had everything that matters and still had joy.

In this roller coaster life there is something that gives us joy no matter what. And it is this beautiful picture cemented in your mind and on your heart and in your soul that you will never forget.

This is what it looks like: **"The Word became flesh."** The all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, eternal, immortal God took on human flesh and was born into this world. The One who exists outside of time was born in time. The One whom all the heavens and all the earth cannot contain was contained in a lowly manger bed. Peer into that manger. What do you see? There lies the sum of everything God wants to tell us, what is at His very heart, His Word made flesh. There lies in that manger the God you so desperately want to know. The God through whom all things were created, who formed our eyes so we can see, who formed our mouths to smile and our hearts to feel joy, that very God doesn't stand aloof from us on some celestial throne far removed from our lives, our ups and downs. No, our God is the one who **"made his dwelling among us."** Literally, **"he took up his residence among us," "pitched his tent with us."** He came to our world full of pains and sorrows, joys and excitements, ups and downs. He came to feel what we feel and do the things we do and to live our life perfectly in our place.

"And we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only from the Father." This is just His glory- hidden in lowliness, yes, for no man can see the full glory of God and live- This is His glory: to be born in a lowly stable, placed in a lowly manger, live a lowly life, die a most lowly death, but then to rise gloriously, to come back to life, to defeat sin, death, and the devil for you and for me, indeed, there is nothing more glorious than that! And we have seen it with our eyes of faith! And all of this goes to show that He is "full of grace and truth." There's nothing more gracious in life than the fact that God our Savior would come to this earth and save us not because of us but because of Him and His all-surpassing love for us. There's nothing more true in all the world than Him: the embodiment of truth itself. Everything about Him is true and is reality and everything He ever said is true and reality including when He said, "Because I live you also will live."

With the eyes of faith you see the picture. It's cemented in our hearts and in our minds far more than any "Kodak moment." We of all people, we, Christians, have every reason to be joyful always, not only on Christmas or when good things happen in our lives, but all the time! We have so much! The Word became flesh for you. You have seen his glory and you will see it forever in heaven! Yes, life is full of ups and downs, things coming and things going, but there's one thing that remains constant: salvation that is yours because of the Word made flesh, Jesus. The devil cannot take your salvation from you; he can't rip you out of your Savior's hands. But he can try to take the joy of your salvation from you. He'll throw all kinds of things in your life: disappointments, discouragements, disasters, depressing things, etc. It's when these come, when the bad news comes, or when life seems to be monotonous and not going anywhere, when you're tempted to have a ho-hum attitude about life, take another look at this picture, see the glory in that manger once again, it changes everything: the Word became flesh, your God came in a manger to save you, He came in a manger to give His life for you, He came in a manger to give you life to the full, He came in a manger to die on the cross for your sins, He came in a manger to rise from the dead and conquer death for you, and He will come again, but not in a manger, but as the King of kings and Lord of lords, to take you to heaven with Him. There in heaven there will be no more downs only ups, gladness, excitement, laughter, singing, dancing, there our joy will be complete!

So what is it you picture? What picture are you going to take away with you this Christmas? How about this one: the Word became flesh; your God come to save you! This gives you joy, not just at Christmas, not just today or tomorrow or next year or the rest of your life, but forever! Yes, see His glory and rejoice always! Amen.