

“In The Beginning Was The Word”

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” The baby, whose birth we are eagerly awaiting to celebrate in 3 1/2 weeks has always been there for us.

As you contemplate the enormity of those divine statements, I want to share something with you. We started decorating for Christmas early this year. Now this is big deal for my family, because we have been known to wait until at least the middle of December to begin. In fact, if you’ve ever wondered what it’s like to drive around all afternoon in a panic trying to find a Christmas tree lot that has any trees left, talk to me after service, and I’ll tell you. And while we haven’t gotten our tree yet, I expect we will one day soon, because we’ve already gotten a head start on so much of the rest. The Christmas glasses and mugs are already in the kitchen. The reindeer candle holder is already on the table. The stuffed Santa’s are out. Even the little sign that says “You better not pout, You better not cry” is already hung. Yes, the pastor and his family like the traditions of Santa, reindeer, trees and silly signs just as much as anyone else. Of course, we do try our best to keep the focus on Jesus during this time of year, which is why our early decorating also includes a total of four different nativity sets strategically placed throughout the house. All of this we did before December 1st! It just might be a record for us and it’s really exciting!

But the one decoration I’m the most excited about this year has to be the gigantic Advent calendar I hung on the wall beside the steps. It’s this huge frame over 4 feet wide with a pocket for each of the 24 days leading up to Christmas. It was a gift from my sister a few years ago, but we never hung

it up in time to actually use it. This year, though, it's all ready to go. Along with the candy my wife and I put in each pocket of the calendar, we also put a devotion in a that we plan to read as a family each day until Christmas. And we're doing this because we know as much as any family how the busy-ness of the season can take over. Pageants, parties, shopping, cooking, planning—all of which invites more and more of our time. But one thing we want our family to remember is that Advent isn't about walking away from all of those things. It's about reorienting our thoughts as we go about the duties of the holiday season. We're just trying to keep the focus on Jesus.

But this is easier said than done, isn't it? That God would choose to become one with humanity in all our vulnerability, humbling himself to experience life with us is a challenging idea. It's enormity is hard to capture fully in a nativity scene, a children's Christmas pageant, or in a series of Advent devotions. And it becomes even harder to process with all the competing words out there. Because, it's no secret that the Christmas season of today is just as much connected to words like 4K TVs, iPhone 11's, new cars, and the North Pole as it is to the Word, Jesus Christ. But this shouldn't surprise us.

These days in our US culture, words seem to mean very little. Take elections for example. I mean, how many of us actually believe the promises so many of the candidates make in their speeches? "If elected I'm going to increase wages, eliminate student loans, make healthcare universal, and increase the size and power of our military—all in the first 90 days of office." No you're not. Or what about when we hear the claims that all those wonderful advertisements make? Do we really believe that one brand of laundry detergent, dog food, or car insurance is really that much better than another? I don't think so. Words, I'm afraid, have become empty to us.

So if we are going to reorient our thoughts this Advent to the wonderful news of God coming into the world in the most personal way, it won't be through the empty words of the world. Because we have come to understand those words simply as what people want us to believe to be true rather than what is actually true. No, to reorient our thoughts this Advent, God will have to keep intruding into our lives with His Word.

And that's exactly what he does. You see we must never forget that a unique fact of Christianity, in contrast to the world's other religions, is the declaration that God became a human being. John tells it so simply and yet so profoundly that it is almost incomprehensible. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God and the word became flesh."* The eternal Word... the Word who is God...the Word through whom all things were created...the Word through whom all things are maintained...the Word who conquered the darkness of evil...that Word loves us enough to become one of us. We might act like we invited it, or wanted it, or even deserved it. But that wouldn't be true. God made all of this happen by intruding into our sinful lives in the person of Jesus Christ. And how thankful we are that he did.

But at the same time, how easily we forget. If we're not careful, Advent can quickly become just another countdown to the earthly pleasures of Christmas Day. If we're listening to the words of the world, stress and anxiety can rear it's ugly head. We snap at each other. We drink too much. We eat too much. And even when we try to keep the focus on the birth of the promised Messiah, so often we prefer the tame version over the intrusive one, don't we? I like the way Dr. Dale Meyer said it in a piece he once wrote. "The manger scenes and greeting cards are so glazed over with sentimentality, that the Holy Family seems unreal. The stable doesn't smell any more. The straw in the manger doesn't scratch the baby. The baby doesn't cry. Mary and Joseph wear clothes that look like they're

fresh from the cleaners. No grime. No sweat. And therefore no real relevance to the problems of our lives.”¹

But it has tremendous relevance to our lives because it actually happened. Not in this buttoned up nostalgic kind of way. But in the ultimate act of intrusion, where the Word became flesh. It's wild; it's not tame; and it definitely defies our understanding. But God doesn't call us to understand it; he calls us to believe it.

So over the next few weeks of Advent on Sundays and on Wednesday nights, we're going to look at the very real way God intrudes into the lives of people like Zechariah and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary, the shepherds, and of course people like you and me. It's an intrusion that culminates in the one who makes us all holy in the sight of God. The one who comes to meet us in our times of despair with his hope. The one who comes to cover our guilt with his word of forgiveness. The one who to know is to know God himself.

Do we still have some decorating to do at our house? You better believe it. Do we still have shopping to do, concerts and plays on the calendar, and hopefully even a couple of parties in the mix? Absolutely. During these next busy weeks ahead, will we still struggle to reorient our thoughts doing our best to keep the focus on Jesus? Of course we will and so will you. But one thing I'm not going to do is call anyone out with threats of "You better put Christ back in Christmas or else!" And I hope you won't either. Because Christ put himself in Christmas from the very start. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."* This Advent may his intrusion reorient our lives to his as never before. **Amen.**

¹ <https://themeyerminute.typepad.com/meyerminute/2017/12/index.html>