



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

December 25, 2016
Christmas Day

God With Us: From Within
John 1:1-14; Hebrews 1:1-4

One of the top gifts this Christmas has been drones, those remote controlled helicopter looking devices that can soar to great heights, provide stunning, panoramic, views, and let you know what the neighbors are doing! On Friday, *The Washington Post* reported that drones are "the gift that 1 in 5 people say they'd like to receive and that 1.2 million of them are going to find under the tree."¹ How many of you found a drone under your tree this morning?

Drones can provide a great view from above and not only can they enable us to get a "birds eye view" of what is around us, they have proved quite useful to land surveyors, farmers, fire fighters, and police. A perspective "from above" can be helpful in many ways.

For thousands of years, humans looked up at the sky and imagined that a creative power dwelled somewhere above the clouds and sun and stars. Being above creation was advantageous because God could keep an eye on everything mortals did. A view from above made it easier to tinker with creation from time to time, making an adjustment here, correcting a problem there, stirring things up over yonder.

Greeks and Romans imagined their gods dwelled high up on Mount Olympus. The Hebrews looked first to Mount Sinai where Moses and God met, then later understood God to be high above all of creation. God could look down on us and even occasionally visit, but heaven was the dwelling place of God. Humanity was consigned to the earth.

Everything changed with Jesus. No longer was it more advantageous to watch humanity from above. That view had its limitations. God wanted to convey his immense love for us and to let us know he understood our lives. The best way to do that was to experience human life as it happened and to be right in the middle of it rather than watching it unfold like a virtual board

¹Ashley Halsey III, "Drone sales soaring this Christmas, capping a record year for the industry," *The Washington Post* (December 23, 2016); available online at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/drone-sales-soaring-this-christmas-capping-a-record-year-for-the-industry/2016/12/22/09d81c94-c862-11e6-85b5-76616a33048d_story.html?utm_term=.4f6d916ea904.

game seen from above. There was no better way to see, experience, and understand our lives than as one of us. So God tossed off the garments of heaven and slipped into the skin of humanity. And what better way to understand human life than to do so from the beginning? God became a baby and began life as you and I did.

Not only was it a brilliant move, it was also a compassionate act. God loved us so much that God wanted to know us from the inside out, to see and feel, to taste and smell and hear life from our perspective. Jesus was born—Immanuel—God with us.

From the first bleary sight of Mary and Joseph hovering over their baby boy to the smells and sounds of sheep and shepherds, donkeys and cows, to the exotic and interesting men who brought expensive and puzzling gifts from faraway lands, Jesus soaked up everything the earth had to offer. The dirt lanes and fields of Nazareth were a playground for Jewish boys and girls just as the streets and parks of Rocky Mount were for children who grew up here. The excitement of traveling to Jerusalem as a boy on the cusp of adulthood was surely equivalent to seeing Raleigh or Washington or New York for the first time from the backseat of a car. The immediate connection with scholars at the temple who understood the things he was thinking was as electric for Jesus as is the opening of our minds in high school and college classrooms. Relationships with friends and concern for the state of his nation and world were as important for Jesus as they are for us. The desire to put others first, to give one's life for the sake of a higher calling, and the willingness to die for what he believed were no different from the best virtues which motivate us.

God saw from within the goodness he had formed at the dawn of creation. God also felt firsthand those attractions, compulsions, and temptations that constantly threaten to corrode the goodness and enable evil to penetrate the heart of humanity. God in Christ experienced all of the wonder and goodness of human life as well as the sorrow, the disappointment, and the cruelty of which his greatest creation is capable. In his penultimate act of compassion, the baby become Savior willingly died in the hope that he could take all of the hatred and evil with him to the grave. Finally, with what was surely God's greatest act of compassion, Christ rose from the grave to offer each of us life that is eternal and complete.

Any imaginable god could take his perch on high and play with creation much as a child plays with a toy village. Only a God powerful enough to

humble himself and become part of his creation is able to love that creation into life.

Today we celebrate the love of God that dwells among us, not above us. We offer thanksgiving that God lives with us and does not merely hover over us. We rejoice that God came as one of us, to understand and love us, and to offer us the life only God can give. Christ our Savior is born! Rejoice! Christ our Savior is born! Amen.

December 25, 2016

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

God who is the maker of all things and the giver of all good gifts, with joy and thanksgiving we gather as your people to experience again the wondrous Good News of Christ's birth. In the excitement of this day, quiet our hearts that we may know the peace and fullness of these holy moments. Close every door of hate and open to us pathways of love for all your children. Transform our hearts and minds to reflect the image of the child whose birth changes us and changes the world. May we offer kindness with every gift and grace with every greeting. Fill us with gratitude for the blessings which flow from your generous hand with such extravagance that we cannot help but respond to the needs of others with mercy and compassion.

Shine, O Light, in the darkness of our world!

Sing, O angels, in the joy of all heaven and nature!

Come, O Holy Child of Bethlehem, in the stillness of our hearts, for our hearts are ready to worship and adore you,
the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. Amen.

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