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Christmas Continued
John 1:1-18

1 In the beginning was the **Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2 He was in the beginning with God.
3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being
4 in him was **life**, and the life was the **light** of all people.
5 The light **shines in the darkness**, and the darkness did not overcome it.
6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was **John**.
7 He came as a **witness** to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. **8** He himself was not the light, but he came to **testify** to the light.
9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.
11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.
12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,
13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.
14 And the **Word became flesh and lived among us**, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.
¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.
¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,^[e] who is close to the Father's heart,^[f] who has **made him known**.

Have you ever wanted Christmas to **continue**?
 I know that I'm usually ready for Christmas to be **over**,
 because of how hard it is this time of year.
 I love its meaning and the birth of Christ,
 but I get weary from all the hubbub...the shopping and spending money,
 the gift giving, the eating, not to mention the family gatherings
 with all the crazy relatives, and sometimes without the ones you miss most.

But this year I was thinking---I would want Christmas to continue, if by that we meant **relaxing, thinking about Jesus' birth, resting** in His presence, and **sharing** his love...that I could keep doing.

So, what if **Christmas was continued**?

Actually it does last **12 days**, ending with **Epiphany**, the Sunday near January 6th, when we remember the arrival of the three **wise men** who followed the star. This is why we are not taking down the greens til next Sunday, because Christmas is a **twelve day event** in the Christian year.

And, Advent and Christmas is also the **beginning** of our church year, not the end of it like in our calendars. Everything begins with the birth of Jesus.

So what if Christmas was **continued in your heart and home**?
What would that **mean for you**?

How could we continue the **life-giving spirit of Christmas**, **without all the stress** of what Christmastime has become in our culture?

I think that John 1 holds a **key** for us.
John's Gospel begins by reminding us of Genesis 1 and the beginning of all creation.
He reminds us that **Jesus IS God**,
has always been God,
and came into our world as God.

John calls Jesus **logos in Greek**, which means **Word**. Why?
Do you remember **HOW God created** the world?
By **speaking** it into existence.

And what was at the beginning of creation?
Darkness and light.
John tells us that **Jesus is THE light of all people.**
5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.
So Christmas is about God coming to us in Jesus,
And **Jesus coming as the light.**

It's no accident that we celebrate this season with **lights**—
in our decorations, but more importantly, in our **worship**.
We light the **Advent wreath** to remind us of Christ's light.
We have a **candlelight communion** service on Christmas Eve.

Each Sunday we continue to welcome **the light of Christ**,
coming into our world, and into our hearts,
but at Christmas it takes on **special significance**.
Christmas is about the **greatest light**,
piercing the darkness of our lives,
Our Savior, coming into our world as **life and light**.

John talks about Jesus as **light and life** often in his gospel,
in chapters 5, 8, 10, 12, and 17.
Some have even called this Gospel the **Gospel of light**,
because it truly **illuminates** our understanding of Jesus' identity.
It's more than just a **history** book on the life of Christ,
it is a **theological** book about **who** Jesus is and **why** he came as one of us.

In John we really see that **God took on skin**.
That's what it means when John says,
*And the **Word became flesh and lived among us**, and we have seen his glory,
the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*
This is known as the **Incarnation**—God in the flesh.

In the Gospel of John we learn that the incarnation of Jesus
is the **only way we can see** and understand God.

Listen to verse 18 again:

*¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,^[e] who is close to the Father's
heart,^[f] who has made him known.*

Isn't that **amazing** when you think about it?
This is how God chose to enter our world.
God did not come as a **tourist**,
God did not come like an angel coming down for a bit to check out what
human life is like...only to return to heaven.
God did not come as a **celestial ruler or King** to take over the world.
God came in a **tiny vulnerable baby**...in **humble** circumstances.

This is ***how we 'see' God.***
Through Jesus.

All throughout the Bible people ***want to see God,***
but even Moses is kept from seeing God's face.
He only sees him from behind.
Elijah only hears a small whisper.
Other prophets only hear God's voice.
God is ***so awesome, so holy,*** we cannot see God face to face....
except in the incarnation, when ***Jesus becomes human.***

In the play ***Green Pastures,*** which ran for many years on Broadway,
playwright Marc Connelly has a moving and memorable scene.
The Lord is anxiously looking out from heaven,
trying to decide what to do with the sinful situation on earth.
Gabriel enters with his horn tucked under his arm.
Sensing the Lord's dilemma, he brushes his lips across the trumpet to keep the
feel of it and asks, "Lord, has the time come for me to blow the trumpet?" "No,
no," said the Lord, "don't touch the trumpet, not yet."
God continues to worry with the problem.
Gabriel asks the Lord again what he plans to do.
Will he send someone to tend to the situation? Who will it be?
Gabriel makes some suggestions. "How about another David or Moses?
You could send one of the prophets: Isaiah or Jeremiah.
There are lots of great prophets up here!
What do you think, Lord?"
Without looking back at Gabriel, God said, "I am not going to send anyone.
This time ***I am going myself!***"
from the sermon A Permanent Glimpse of God, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Lane Butts, *Day 1*, 2009.

At Christmas, God came—in the person of Jesus.
The incarnation.
The Word became flesh and blood, and lived among us.

Just the fact that ***God came to us*** is amazing,
and reason for our celebration and hope.
Our God is ***not a distant old man in the sky!***
God loves us so much, God has become one of us!

This is the reason for *celebration and hope at Christmas*.

And, it means we are *not alone*.

We are *never alone*.

God came into this world *to be with us*,

To live, teach, heal, and preach.

To die on a cross to save us from sin,

and be raised from death, that we might have eternal life.

In The Message Bible translation, Eugene Peterson says in verse 14:

The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.

Jesus moved into our neighborhood.

The Word *dwelt* among us.

The Greek word for *dwelt* means '*tabernacled*'.

Do you know what a tabernacle is?

In the Old Testament it was the *tent* where people would *worship* God.

The tabernacle was built to *house the presence of God*.

It was a *sign that God was always with them*

before they had a permanent Temple.

Our sign that God is always with us is the person of *Jesus*.

The one who *didn't just come and 'visit'* earth,

Jesus came to live and die,

to save us from our sin and brokenness,

and give us new and everlasting life.

We have *seen God* in Jesus.

We have *seen THE light of the world* in him.

Our God is with us.

Jesus was also called *Emmanuel, which means 'God with us'*.

So even in our darkest hour,

our most challenging situations,

our most harrowing temptations.

God is with us, in Jesus.

If there's something we might want to '*continue*' from Christmas,

This could be it.

This **hope**—of God with us.
 This **good news of great joy**—
 that enables us to **live as disciples** of the Savior born in Bethlehem.

So, if you could have Christmas continue,
What would that mean to you?

I read a beautiful poem by Howard Thurman this week, called:
“The Work of Christmas”:

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
 when the star in the sky is gone,
 when the kings and princes are home,
 when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
 the work of Christmas begins:
 to find the lost,
 to heal the broken,
 to feed the hungry,
 to release the prisoner,
 to rebuild the nations,
 to bring peace among the people,
 to make music in the heart.*

Wouldn't that be awesome?
 If we did continue Christmas---that way?

The question now is, **HOW will we find the lost, heal the broken,
 feed the hungry, release prisoners, rebuild nations, bring peace,
 and make music in our hearts?**

Each Sunday we have the opportunity to **make music** in our hearts,
 in worship.
 Are we **taking advantage** of that opportunity each week?

What about **finding the lost?**
 Who are the **lost that you encounter** in your life?
 Sometimes when there's not a line at the grocery checkout
 I have a conversation with the clerk and ask how they are doing,
 and how they are feeling.

How can you reach out to some people who might feel lost?

Who are the ***broken people*** around you?

They may be in our community, our church, or even our family.

The question is: ***Who is weighing heavy on your heart—***
and how will you ***reach out to them*** now--with God's hope?

When will you call? Write? Visit?

What about the ***hungry***?

We all know about feeding people—which we do through
Owasso Community Resources, and the Youth Café.

But what about ***other types of hunger***?

Are we meeting the ***spiritual needs of people*** through this church?

How are we feeding those hungry in ***body, and spirit***?

What about ***releasing prisoners***?

We may not have the ability to release people from a physical prison,
but what about those who ***are imprisoned***
with depression, loneliness, or addiction?

How do we ***share the grace*** of Jesus with them?

Do we share judgment, or the hope and freedom of Jesus?

When I hear ***rebuilding nations***, I think of our friends in ***Malawi***, Africa.

As a church, we partner with them to help in their churches and their
communities—

especially when it comes to ***education, healthcare, or small businesses***.

How can we ***continue and grow*** this ministry?

My favorite line in the poem is ***to bring peace among the people***.

That might be one of the most ***powerful acts*** in our culture right now—

To bring peace.

It might just be the ***most influential thing*** we can do in our world today.

We ***can bring the peace of Christ***—

we can ***speak*** it to others, and we can ***live*** it.

Ours is a world of such ***harsh divisions***.

Hatred and prejudice have become ***norms*** for our discourse and actions,
so imagine a world where we bring some peace!

We each have a sphere of influence,
 What if we were to **speak and live** Christ's peace!
 How can we do that—today? This week?

These are just some ways that we can **continue the spirit of Christmas**.
 The trees and lights may come down, but the **hope continues**.
 Because the Word become flesh is **still at work** in our world.
 The **Word lives on**, through us,
 and the **light of the world still illuminates** the darkest places,
 and we are lamps holding that light.

Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor has some good questions about John 1.
 She asked, what is **Your Word**—the Word of God that **you bring to life**?
 Think about the Words that describe Jesus---which one do you bring?
 Will you bring **grace? Patience? Peace? Generosity?**
 Where is your spiritual gift, and **what Word** you can bring to life?
 Feasting on the Word, year C, Vol. 1, pg. 191.

Similarly, when a **visitor** leaves our church,
 what **three words might come** to their mind? What words do we bring to life?
 Is it hospitality? Family? Welcome?
 What **three words** would we want to be in their remembrance of
 First Presbyterian of Owasso?

I think if this is what we mean by **continuing Christmas, I'm up for it**.
How about you?
 Friends, hear the **Good News of the Gospel** this First Sunday of Christmas:
Christmas IS continued—through us.
 The Savior born in Bethlehem has been born into our hearts,
 and **we share his life and light!**
 And to that all God's people said, Amen.