

SERMONETTE for First Sunday of Christmas 2015  
Presbyterian Church in Leonia NJ  
Rev. TGP

“Putting Skin On”

In the beginning was the Word  
And the Word was with God  
And the Word was God  
He was in the beginning with God.  
All things came into being in him, and without him not one thing came  
into being.  
What has come into being in him was life,  
And the life was the light of all people.  
The light shines in the darkness  
And the darkness has not overcome it.  
There was a person sent from God, whose name was John.  
He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe  
through him.  
He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.  
The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.  
He was in the world, and the world came into being in him, yet the  
world did not know him.  
He came to what was his own, and his own people did not receive him.  
But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to  
become children of God –  
Who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of  
man, but of God.  
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.

*When I was very young, someone set a puzzle before me: What is the most important day of the church's year? This puzzle has stayed with me through my life, and I keep turning it over and over in my mind, especially as I encounter other people and other churches who might answer the question differently.*

Many people say Easter is the most important day of the year. It is the great day of rejoicing, the victory of light over darkness, the triumph of life over death.

And there are those who would say the most important day is Good Friday, in all its terrible sadness. Good Friday, the day Jesus died, is such a hard day that many people don't even go to church to observe it. Perhaps it is so important because it's so terribly hard.

There are also those who suggest Pentecost is the most important day of the church's year, because without Pentecost we might not have a church. It's often called the birthday of the church – it's the day when the Gospel was first preached to the world, in many different languages. Pentecost is a wonderful holiday too, because nobody has managed to commercialize it. There is no pentecost bunny or pentecost elves or pentecost shopping season, so the holiday is blessedly free from outside interference. That helps us stay focused on it.

Well, which is it? Which is the most important day of the year?

Theologians and scholars will debate the finer points of this question for centuries to come. I hope you will take this puzzle home with you and turn it over in your mind. But as I'm sure you can guess, today I'm going to offer you a reason why Christmas MIGHT be the most important day of the year.

Easter is indeed the day when light triumphed over darkness. But Christmas is the day when light ENTERED darkness. It is the beginning of the new story, and you can't have the end without the beginning.

If Christmas hadn't started a new story, things could be very different. We could have a world where God abandoned us in the darkness. We could have a world where the darkness ultimately triumphs. Or we might be left wondering which way the balance would swing.

Christmas is the story of when God decided to come close to us – not to leave us alone – to engage with us, help us, teach us, live and share with us. Christmas is the story of when God decided to become one of us.

Psychology tells us that in order to transform our inner turmoil – whether that is our hatred or anger or fear, we don't only need to fight against it. Yes, there is a time to struggle. But if we only turn away from it, kicking and fighting against it, we cannot transform it. So the first step is to turn toward our inner turmoil, and to accept it with love. And Christmas is the story of God turning toward us, not rejecting us for all the tragedies and violence of our world, but coming close in love.

I hope you have heard the story of the little child who cried at night. This is a story that deserves to be told over and over again. And I don't know who the little child was, but the story is told that he cried at night, afraid of the dark. He was especially afraid of the dark when things would go bump, or the wind would howl, and he would cry for his mother. Each time his mother would go to him, and sit by his bed. She would hold his hand and speak softly to him, telling him that God was always with him, and that he was safe in their house. And one night, while his mother was softly repeating these words to him, that God was with him, and he was safe, between sobs he blurted out, "It's fine that God is always with me, but sometimes you just need somebody with skin on!"

Christmas is the story of God with skin on. No longer are we crying in the dark without a hand to hold. Jesus, our brother, our savior, and our friend, is God with us, Emmanuel. The triumph will come later. The light will overcome the darkness. But for now, in a broken and fearful world, it is enough to know that God is here, with us, with skin on. That we might receive God's presence with us, and that we might be God's presence for those who need a hand to hold, we pray. Amen.