

J.j. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 57th & Broadway, Sacramento, CA
Second Sunday of Xmass, B, January 4, 2015 A.D.

John 1:1-18 1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14And 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. 15(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") 16From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. {NRSV}

Divine Gene Therapy

Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God our Father and Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love. Amen. [2 Jn. 3]

"On the eleventh day of Christmass my true love gave to me...."

Today is the Second Sunday of Christmas and the eleventh day of Christmas.

"Eleven Lord's a Leaping." What does that mean? Nothing, it was a memory exercise. Tomorrow, the first Worship Service for the Epiphany of our Lord after six o'clock is known as Twelfth Night, because liturgically every feast and festival begins at six the evening before.

So tomorrow at 6 PM, in one sense, the liturgical season of Christmass ends.

But the genius of the Church Year takes every major Feast through three stages: 1] Anticipation/preparation; 2] Celebration of the historic event; and 3] Extending the meaning of the event celebrated!

Thus for Christmass, the Feast of the Father, the First Person of the Holy Trinity, we have 1] Advent/waiting; 2] the twelve days of Christmass celebrating the event; 3] then the festival of the Epiphany and the Epiphany season which extends and explains the meaning of the Christ event.

Therefore, in one sense, Christmas lasts from Advent I to Ash Wednesday.

Of course, at Ash Wednesday Lent begins, and the cycle of three begins again centered on the Feast of God the Son, the Second Person in the Holy Trinity, namely the event of the Resurrection of our Lord, which this year, by the way, is the first Sunday in April; which then makes the third major Feast Day, for the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit, May 24.

So on this Second Sunday of Christmass, after the three days of the martyrs, after Old Simeon's and Anna's stories at the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple, and after the Name Day of Jesus on January 1, we continue the celebration of the historic event with the Apostle John's account of our Lord's birth in the flesh.

We have before us the Prologue of John's Gospel.

It is so densely packed with meaning that my seminary class spent several weeks, three hours per week, just on these 18 verses. (*Thanks to Ed Schroeder for the following ideas.*)

In that 18th verse there's the Greek word *μονογενής* (pronounced: MON~O~GEN~ES). It is the word John uses for Jesus being God's "only begotten, uniquely begotten" Son. We could pronounce it MONO-GENES in English, and the notion of *g.e.n.e.s.*, "genes," as we now use that word in English, is indeed there in the Greek term, I'm told.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit John is saying, Jesus, the only begotten Son, has genes -- genetics--that are "one of a kind," that is, perfect! Perfect genes!

And that's my **first point: the Babe of Bethlehem was perfect his whole life.**

He's the only man who ever lived who was perfect.

Wait a minute, is that a true statement? How about Adam - - - - and Eve?

Before they fell into sin they were perfect. Ahh, but they did fall, and great are the consequences to this day.

It means that we and all humans are cursed with defective genes.

So the **second point is The Consequences of Defective Genes.**

Initial Diagnosis: When John starts his Gospel with the words, "In the beginning was the Word..." it was a deliberate echo of Genesis 1, and it reminds us that we children, "we kids," were made in God's image in the beginning.

Not only that, we were genetically wired to reflect his glory.

But then that dreadful event happened (original sin), and now instead of "glowing" with the glory of God we are completely dark!

In fact, we prefer darkness!

John says we "did not recognize him..." the Incarnate God--when He arrived.

10He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

The sorry thing is, we can't even help it! That's the way we were born.

No glory here of our own--no light--nothing but dark!

Actual sin showed up early in Adam & Eve's family in the form of fratricide--Cain killed his brother Abel.

Then the human race went from bad to worse till the Almighty decided to start over. A universal flood was sent to drown all humanity except Noah and his family who were saved in the Ark.

But was Noah a good restart? The Psalmist wrote a thousand or more years later:

Ps. 10: 1 Why, O Lord, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in times of
trouble?

2
In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor;
let them be caught in the schemes they have
devised.

3 For the wicked boast of the desires of their
heart, those greedy for gain curse
and renounce the Lord.

4
In the pride of their countenance the wicked
say, "God will not seek it out";
all their thoughts are, "There is no God."

Sounds like we can't help it, and John says we were generated by defective genes.

We were "born of blood...will of the flesh...will of a human"(v. 13).

We lost God's "mono genes," and although we want to fix our genetic deficit by following Moses and his Ten Commands, nothing works, we can't do it.

We can't change our genes, they're IN us, they DETERMINE us--and they're defective.

Third point, the sad thing about defective genes is that they destroy life.

They cannot produce light and life, instead, they end up killing us.

We sense that we were originally born into--created for--the inheritance which includes the perks--the benefit package--God's kids get to enjoy.

But just as so long ago the angel with a sword barred the way to the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve left in disgrace, so now there is "a great gulf fixed"

between us and "the bosom of Abraham." Our defective genes destroy life.

Point 4, Our Loving Father Provided GENE THERAPY--He Sent a Donor

Defective genes are helpless to change themselves.

If there's any hope at all, therapy has to come from outside.

THERAPY. . .definition: from *therapeuein* "to cure, treat medically," literally "attend, do service, take care of" (see "Therapeutic").

Folks, you know, within our lifetimes, medical researchers have learned radical therapy involving gene splicing, and for that, "perfect" donor genes are needed.

John proclaims the good news that the mono-genes, “**God the only Son,...**” choose to leave his privileged spot [“**close to the Father's heart**” (v. 18) on the Father's lap] so that He could offer to be our gene donor.

Think about this--imagine that you could be on a spaceship, the one they're planning to send to Mars.

How many years will it take you to get there? I forget, but quite a few.

And then, at Mars, you're still not out of our Milky Way constellation.

Imagine you could go sailing right past Mars and go on and on out into space.

Now listen, God would be there! and no matter how far you travelled you could never reach the outer limits of our omnipresent Creator God!

And now the Son of the Mighty God is born in human flesh--what a mystery.

St. Paul in Phillipians 2: “**6...though he was in the form of God, [Jesus] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, [held onto at all costs] 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.**

The Son of God, who fills all in all, reduced Himself by a kind of “emptying” and took the form of a slave! What a Wonder! What a Mystery!

It is a mind bending thought that God is here in the gift of His Son, Jesus. John wrote: **14And 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.**

That's John's Christmass story, the cosmic marvel that occurred in Bethlehem! Jesus became the donor who saves us.

But this divine transplant doesn't happen in a test tube!

It happened on the cross! This therapy . . . cost the donor his life!

Here's what The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, wrote:

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,
I recall this image from my home congregation: A banner depicting Mary and Jesus in the manger and the backlit silhouette of the cross cast over this scene. It was jarring. The cross on Christmas? I didn't like it.

The hope of Christmas was fulfilled on Good Friday. The cross is part of Christmas. “Nails, spear shall pierce him through, the cross be borne for me, for you” (What Child Is This?). The cross is *the* Christmas gift, where all of our Christmas glorias are realized in Jesus' glorification on the cross.

Last Point, when gene transplants "take," old cells get marvelously transformed.

When we "believe in his name," [have the true faith] the transplant works!

We get a new genetic makeup. John tells us (v.12) we get the "right to become children of God!"

Transformed, "born of the Spirit," we are recognized as having the same genetic makeup as the Beloved Donor [mono-genes], and we are accepted as family.

Our transformed lives can now do that which we were "wired" to do in the first place: shine with God's light!

We "children of God" reflect the glory of the "father's only son, full of grace and truth," (v. 14) not just for our own sake, but to lighten the paths of those who are still in the dark, "so that all might believe through us." (John 20:31)

And that, John says, is what Christmas is about!--that ALL might believe!

That IS good news!

Glory to God + in the Highest!