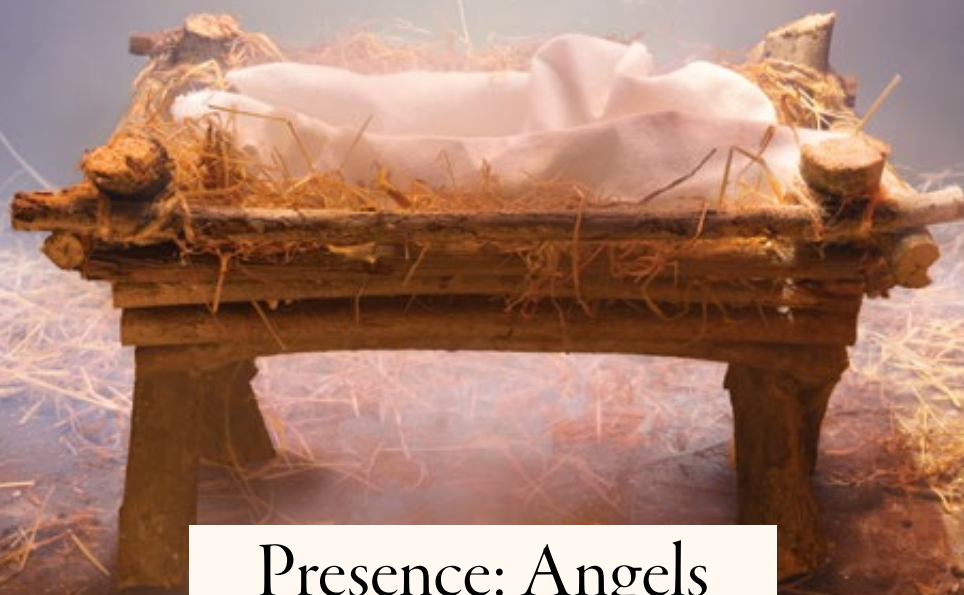




THE LIGHT OF *grace*

A SERMON FOR CHRISTMAS DAY



Presence: Angels

CHRISTMAS DAY



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- The **Sermon** is delivered by the pastor **P** as narrator and two readers, **I** and **II**, as angels:

P We know that angels are heavenly beings that spread God’s word. But the word *angels* can also be used more broadly in our world today. In fact, we often use the word *angels* to describe people who do good deeds.

In many contexts, *angels* can simply mean “messenger”—be they human or heavenly. John, in his gospel, is one of those human messengers. And what he transmits to us are some bold, even godly, claims about the presence of the Word.

I *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

II *He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.*

P Citing the Word as being with God rings remarkably similar to the first words in the Scriptures. “In the beginning...” are the first words used in both contexts to introduce God’s creation. So it seems the Word was present all along with God from that very beginning, sharing in God’s very presence, and in all of God’s glory. It was, after all, God’s own Word, God-speak, that brought all things into being in the creation. “Then God said, ‘Let there be’... and it was so.”

But the most outlandishly bold thing that this angel-evangelist says about the Word is to connect this Word at creation with its own incarnation, becoming flesh and blood. Where does this angel-evangelist get that audacity? From the very same source that we do, as we celebrate this flesh-and-blood incarnation of the Word this Christmas Day—from Jesus the Christ!

I *The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory,*

II *the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

P Still, we ought not let these words about the Word gloss over us. What they are saying is that Jesus who was born sometime two millennia ago, and died on a cross some thirty-something years later, is also the very presence of God's Word that was at the beginning, and even now sits at the right hand of God.

What we are saying is that all our own limited conceptions of history are done away with and made new in the birth of the Word-made-flesh Jesus.

To be sure, it is also confessed by us, as angel-confessors, in the creed about our Lord Jesus Christ that he was “the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father; through him all things were made.”

But historically, until two millennia ago, there was no Jesus. Do we trust that faithful connection between this young Jewish male named Jesus and the pre-Jesus Word that was in the very presence of God who was the creator of all things in the beginning? More importantly, why should we trust this is so?

John seeks to give an answer to that “why” question in his opening prologue to his gospel.

Yet as he does so, even he is aware that there are doubts—doubts about Jesus, about whether or not Jesus is this very presence of the divine Word of God, even the Word in the flesh. John recognized that many in the late first century questioned Jesus' credentials, especially when they considered Jesus among the glowing credentials of others. Some thought that Moses or perhaps Abraham was more impressive. Still others valued the firebrand John the Baptist. And in doing so, they would even point out that before Jesus was in the flesh, these others had already been in the flesh.

For this reason, many doubted Jesus, choosing instead to follow their own designated leaders whom they believed were just as good, if not better, than Jesus—even better about being true to the Word of God.

Some of the other evangelists even tell the story of when Jesus asked his disciples, “Who am I?” Jesus' disciples all gave him rave and grandiose reviews—John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets. Jesus had no doubts about who he was or what he was about. In fact, it was precisely because he did not doubt that Jesus could not accept any of these answers as getting to the heart of who he was. Yet even when Peter shouted out, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus still held back—and held back precisely because Jesus feared that his disciples would misunderstand. Hence, he ordered the disciples not to talk about it—at least not until after his death. Did that clear up all the misunderstanding or doubts from the minds