

# Christmas 1 2020

## John 21:19b to end

After this he said to him, "Follow me."

### **Jesus and the Beloved Disciple**

**20** Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" **21** When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" **22** Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!" **23** So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but "If it is my will that he remains until I come, what is that to you?"

**24** This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.

**25** But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit  
Amen.

Have you ever noticed that when you get together with your family or friends and start telling stories about what happened years ago, the same events sound very different as different people tell their version? Depending on who's describing it, the man who lived across the street may have either been a scrooge or a saint, different points of view, from different people.

Today I would like to start my sermon with a picture of an 'average' man, living with his family. I'm not sure where I hear about him, and I don't know where he lives, but he has a job and, although not wealthy, they are comfortably off. They married in Church and the children attend Sunday school, but for him there is just something missing, something he just doesn't understand.....

Now, today just 2 days after Christmas, we have heard, this year again, as we do every year, the Christmas story,

The story of the manger and the shepherds and the angels. And it's the same story Matthew tells in his gospel, with Joseph's dreams, the wise men, and the flight to Egypt. It's the story Luke, also tells, but Luke focuses more on the shepherds and Mary. Matthew is more traditional. He was very concerned with making it clear that Jesus fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies as the Messiah, the King of Jews. Luke is more concerned with the underdog, those on the edge of society, manual labourers, shepherds, women, Then there's John. John may have heard of the messages written in Matthew and Luke, but he's not primarily an historian or a Jewish royalist. John is a theologian, he mixed with the Greeks and understood mystic writings. He writes of the meaning of Jesus' birth, in a different way. But he's still telling the same story – all three are talking about the same birth and life – all three are saying the same thing, just in different ways.

John does begin the story earlier – he reminds us that Christmas really begins where Genesis begins, in the beginning, with God in creation. So,

using language evocative of Genesis, John begins by talking about the Word of God. This Word was with God, and this Word was God.

Then John tells the Christmas story – in just nine words. “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” He who was with God in creation, the one who is God revealing himself to humanity, this one became a person, became flesh – as completely human as you and I. But a person, who was the Word – who was God’s own self. Jesus.

I don’t know about you, but I was expecting to hear a bit more of the Christmas story today in our Bible reading, perhaps focusing on the light. Because, in addition to telling the same story, Matthew, Luke and John also share one special way of telling it: There is one image, one symbol, that they all use to talk about Jesus.

They all talk about light – the light of the star, the light that shone around the shepherds, the true light that enlightens every man. The light that shines in the darkness, and this is imagery we can understand, because we know about darkness; we know what it’s like to live in and with darkness.

This year has been pretty dark at times with the pandemic think what it’s like to try to walk through an unfamiliar room that is completely dark. What it’s like when we don’t know where things are. We know how easy it is to go in circles in the dark, and to stub a toe-ouch!.

What John, and Luke and Matthew all say about Christmas is that a light is shining in the darkness and that light is Jesus.

Today’s Gospel reading is from John. John is known as the disciple that Jesus loved, he is the one that reclined next to Jesus at the last supper and the one to whom Jesus entrusted the safe keeping of his mother, Mary, to as he was dying on the cross.

John’s is the last of the 4 gospels and the passage we have heard is right at the end of his book.

We began John’s gospel on Christmas morning with the words “in the beginning was the word” and we end with “.....there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written”.

John’s Gospel is thought by some to be complicated, and it’s not usually the first gospel that comes to mind if you are suggesting a book that someone new to the Bible should read (I would always recommend Mark as a first off as it’s short and punchy)

But there is so much imagery in John, he doesn’t describe miracles or parables but instead has 7 signs and 7 I am sayings for Jesus. Seven being known as a “perfect” number. In this gospel Jesus says “I am....

The bread of life

The living water

The vine  
The gate  
The good shepherd  
The light of the world and  
The way the truth and the life

God is made known to us in Jesus. This means that everything we ever thought about God, Who God is, is fully revealed in Jesus.

Not in just one saying or one parable, or one miracle, but in all of Jesus – in his life, his ministry, his teaching, his death, and resurrection; in these all together we finally have everything we need to see God.

John writes "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it". This is the Christmas story. This is our story.

Remember the tale I started at the beginning about the 'average man'... He was a good and decent man, generous to his family, honest in his dealings with others. But as a modern thinker, seeking complex answers to life's situations, he just could not accept the simple story of Christmas, the "God born as a man in a manger" story. To him, it was beyond belief. It just didn't make sense, and he decided he was too honest to pretend that he believed what he didn't.

So last year, on Christmas Eve, as the family was preparing to leave for a midnight mass, he informed them he would not be going. "I'd be a hypocrite!" he said. So, he stayed behind, and they went.

Shortly after they'd gone, snow began to fall. He stood by the window in the front room and watched the flakes grow bigger and bigger before retreating to his fireside chair to read the newspaper.

Moments later he was startled by a loud bang. Then another. And still another. "What, children throwing snowballs at this time of night?" he thought to himself. Yet it didn't sound like snowballs. And besides, who would be out at that time of night? Going to the patio door and opening it, he saw a flock of birds huddled miserably in the deepening snow. They had apparently been caught in the unexpected snowstorm, and in an effort to find shelter had tried to fly through the large patio door.

What to do? He couldn't just let them lie there getting covered in snow. But what could he do? Then, with a flash of inspiration, he thought of the garden shed. That would provide a safe, warm place for them to recover. Grabbing his coat, and torch he walked outside to the shed and threw open the creaking wooden door. He tried to encourage the birds in, but they wouldn't go in.

"Food!" he said out loud. Food would entice them. So, running back to the house, he found some bread. He proceeded to make a trail of bread leading to the shed.

Still, the birds wouldn't go in. He tried catching them. He tried shoing them by walking all around them, waving his arms. But they scattered in every direction except toward the open shed door.

Then it dawned on him: "They are afraid of me. To them I'm a strange, mysterious creature. If only I could tell them I'm trying to help - that they can trust me. If only I could mingle with them and speak their language. If only I could become a bird so they could hear, see, and understand - maybe then they would follow me into the safe warm shed."

Just then he heard the church bells in the distance ringing out the tune to the familiar carol, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come!" It seemed like a message meant just for him. His doubts melted away, and he fell to his knees in the snow.

May this Christmas time be blessed and peaceful and May we all have strength, health, and happiness in 2021, and I pray this in Jesus name, Amen.