

It's a boy. His name is Jesus.

Week 1

by Mandy Barkhaus

Well, Merry Christmas Eve, everyone. Merry Christmas. I'm Pastor Mandy Berkus. If we don't know each other yet. And I just want to extend a welcome to you as well. So thank you for being here at this time on this special night, our special afternoon.

And it's just great to be together, worshipping and doing all that. It's been a great worship time so far for the band. It sounded excellent and just helped us bring in the spirit. But my favorite part is always Storytime with Mrs. Liz. It's just such a sweet moment to see the kids up here. And I would say that probably almost at least once a week, I hear somebody say, My kid loves to miss lives, or My kid loves to insert another one of our amazing staff or volunteers.

These people are making a difference in the lives of the next generation. And that's a pretty important thing for us here at Horizons. In fact, it's so important. It's part of our mission statement. We are a community where we mature as disciples and lead all to Jesus for the transformation of the world from one generation to the next.

Now, one of the ways that we focus on our mission is simply by telling the Christmas story. Because the Christmas story is so great, it's great for kids to hear it. It leads us right to Jesus. Now. There are a lot of different ways to tell the Christmas story. If you had your kids here last weekend, you probably heard that they had Christmas science experiments last weekend, and they learned about the Christmas story.

They learned about the themes of Advent, hope, peace, joy, and love. They learned how those themes and things are present in the Christmas story. Now, after this amazing Christmas science experiment time. Here is what happened. Miss Liz had to spend quite a bit of time convincing the kids that they were not talking about Princess Peach from Super Mario Brothers, but rather they were talking about the Prince of Peace.

There is a little bit of a difference there. The Christmas story, though, is sometimes Ames gets lost in all the other stories kids and adults are bombarded with these other stories. We have the stories of Saint Nick and Rudolph and Elsa and Ana and, of course, Mario and Luigi, and how do we tell the most important story in a way that's meaningful to adults and to kids?

Well, I'm going to start by telling the story this way. This was a story that was written by a great Danish theologian from a couple of centuries ago. His name was Soren Kirkegaard. And the story he tells is a parable-type story. It's a story that, like Jesus would have told, but this story tells the significance and the power of God and how God interacts with the world.

So. Soren Kirkegaard's story goes something like this. Once upon a time, there was a prince who wanted to find a young woman suitable enough to marry and be the queen. So, one day, while he was running an errand with his dad, he passed through a section of the town village that was poor and impoverished. And he glanced out the carriage window, and his eyes fell on this beautiful woman.

During the next few days, he kept passing by this area of town, and he soon fell in love with this peasant woman. But he had a problem. He was the prince, and she was far from royalty and in a different class. And for them, that caused an issue. So he thought, What are my options? And he said, well, he could order her to marry him.

Like that's in his power, he could just say, You're my wife now, but even a prince wants his bride to marry him freely and voluntarily, not through an order. So he thought, well, maybe he could put on his most splendid uniform and drive right up to her house in a carriage with six beautiful white horses, and he could roll out the red carpet right to her front door.

But if he did that, he would never be certain. If he is, she loves him for who he is or simply because of his money, wealth, and power. He also thought maybe he could masquerade as a peasant. And then, once he won her heart, he would pull off the mask. But he thought that would be too deceiving.

So, the prince came up with another solution. He would give up his kingly robe, not just take it off like he would give up his royalty and move into the impoverished village entering not with the crown gone, but rather in in garb in the garb of a peasant. And he lived among the people. He shared their interest and shared their concerns with them.

He spoke their language. He got to know them. He became one of them. And in time, the young woman got to know him and grew to love him for who he was. And because he had first loved her, they lived happily ever after. Now, this story is a simple child-like story by one of the most brilliant minds. That explains what we mean when we say incarnation, that God came and lived here among us in the form of Jesus and into the world as the form of a baby.

Now, this baby, it's a boy. Now, gender reveal parties were not a thing when I was pregnant with my sons, and I don't think they were probably a thing when Mary was pregnant. But on that silent night long ago, not only would Mary say it's a boy, but she would also say It's God with us, it's a boy, and it is God with us.

God showed up to be with us. He spoke our language. He cared about what we cared about. Now, God did not use His power to command us to love Him. He could have created robots, but instead, he came in the form of a human, and he got to know us. And then he offered his grace and love for us to accept or reject.

It's our choice, but it is a gift that we don't deserve, that we don't earn. Now, the idea of God is somewhat incomprehensible, but Jesus, Jesus, we can understand, like we can get to know Jesus like the guy who created the stars and the universe and everything in it was willing to step down and be one of us with us.

And then later, by sending the Holy Spirit to work in us. And because of this, when people say, Well, show us your God, we can easily point to Jesus. As we can say, there He is like There is our God. That's the God that we serve. Like we can read Jesus's words, we can read about our God's actions and what our God did.

Then, we ourselves can do the things that Jesus did and show God others through us. Now, there are four different gospel accounts of the story of Jesus story, and they all have a different way of telling the

story. Now, the first three gospels, which we call the Synoptic Gospels, focus more on what Jesus did and what Jesus taught.

But the Gospel of John taught us more about who Jesus is. Now, John was the very last one to write, so he would have known about Matthew, Mark, and Luke. He would have known their words. But John is writing to Gentile believers and seeking unbelievers, and John tells the story in a different way. He tells the story in a way that enhances all of the other gospels.

Now, for seekers and doubters who like trying to figure out God and how God interacts and relates to humans, the Gospel of John is for them. Some say that the Gospel of John is like a pool, and it's a pool that's shallow enough for a child to splash around in yet deep enough for an elephant to swim. And, like, you'll get that as we start reading this book.

The first part is beautifully written. It is almost poetic, but even in these first few verses, it; we could spend time unpacking this content for weeks, but the first thing that John does is he begins in the same way as in the very first book in the Old Testament in Genesis. And he begins with in the beginning, like John is about to tell the story of Jesus.

And he starts with the beginning of all things linking God to Jesus. So we're going to be in John chapter one, and we're starting at the very first verse. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. The word was with God. In the beginning, everything came into being through the word, and without the word, nothing came into being. What came into being through the word was life.

And the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light. Now, the night the study Bible puts it this way, they explain the Greek word for word, as in the beginning was the word, and that the Greek word for word is logos. It is a term that the Greeks used a lot in their writing.

They used the word logos a lot. And for Greeks, they referred they used that word to refer not only to the spoken word but also to the unspoken word. The things that are still in our minds are reason, but then they also use it to apply it to the entire universe. And they meant the rational principle that governs all things.

Then, the Jews used the word logos or word as in the Word of God, and he created the word and the world and everything that governs it. That is how the Jews used that word. The Jewish use of the word logos comes from God to fulfill God's purpose. So then the enduring word Bible commentary, then they bring it all back around like this.

Therefore, in this opening of John, John is saying to both the Greeks and the Jews, for centuries, you have been talking and thinking about the word logos. And now John says, I will tell you who is. John met both the Greeks and the Jews exactly where they were and explained Jesus to them in a way that they already understood.

So John says, like, I will tell you who he is. And John said, Jesus is the life, and Jesus is the light, the light of the world. Who gives us light in the darkness? Who gives us hope for humanity? Because that's what we want. We want hope for humanity when, at times, humanity seems hopeless. Continuing on in John chapter one, starting at verse nine, the true light that shines on all people is coming into the world.

The light was in the world, and the world came into being through the light. But the world didn't recognize the light. The light came to his own people, and his own people didn't welcome him. But those who did welcome him, those who believed in his name, he authorized to become God's children, born not from blood, nor from human desire or passion, but born from God.

The word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen His glory. Glory like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. One of our values is that we want to make sure that everyone knows that they have a place at the table here. Like that's what we want. We want everyone to see that we are welcoming to everyone.

That everyone has a place at the table. John verse four says that life is the light for all people. And I think that this is why God stripped his kingly robe and became flesh to be with us like God made sure by sending his son and through Jesus's words and through Jesus's actions that that we understood that this light was a light for all people.

But then we can ask questions like, Well, what about my annoying neighbor? Or what about my family member who hurt me? Or what about those who are in prison? Or what about those who look different or act differently than I do? Well, what about those living outside of the United States? What about those facing war and violence? And the answer to that is Jesus came as a light for them, too.

And once we believe that Jesus came for all people, we will respond to the world differently around us. I will treat my neighbor differently if I believe that Jesus came to all people; I will think about what's happening in different parts of our country or different parts of our world differently if I believe that Jesus came for all people.

Now, even if you've heard the Christmas story every year since you were a child, there is always something new to learn from the Christmas story. There is a movie on Netflix called Leave the World Behind, and there is a character named G.H. He said nothing frightens me more than a person unwilling to learn, even at their own expense.

That's a darkness I will never understand. We can agree that there is darkness in the world and that Jesus came to be a light. But we have to be willing to learn from Jesus. We have to be willing to understand that Jesus is God. And He came in the flesh to be with us. Now, to be honest with you, I can't help but feel just a little bit guilty this year during our Christmas celebrations.

I know people personally who are struggling this year. And then, if we look around the world, there's darkness all around us. In fact, in the Holy Land in Bethlehem, in that little town where Jesus was born, there are no Christmas celebrations. They've they've canceled Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem today. They are not celebrating Christmas, and they've put Nativity up on destroyed buildings as a symbol that God is still there.

But it's really, really dark this year. Many churches in our community and many churches around the world decided not to light the peace candle this year. They've kept it dark.

And I understand why churches did that. I mean, that is a powerful symbol when you get to this night when all the candles are shining bright, and that one is dark. Silent Night in Bethlehem this year is going to have a different meaning. But I also refuse to let go of the hope that peace on Earth can and will exist.

And I invite you to lean into that, too, because we owe it to the next generation to not give up hope. And I feel like we need to be honest with our kids as much as they can understand. And I think that we also need to be honest with some of the darkness that is happening in our world.

But we have a story to tell. It's the Christmas story of how the invisible God came to live and dwell with us. Because Jesus was born long ago, we can still rejoice. Here is the hope of the Christmas story.

Reader 1: At that time, Augustus Caesar sent an order to all people in the countries that were under Roman rule. The order said that they must list their names in a register. And everyone went to their own towns to be registered.

Reader 2: So Joseph left Nazareth and went to the town of Bethlehem. This town was known as the town of David. Joseph went there because he was from the family of David. Joseph registered with Mary because she was engaged to marry him. (Mary was now pregnant.) While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have the baby.

Reader 3: She gave birth to her first son. There were no rooms left in the inn. So she wrapped the baby with cloths and laid him in a box where animals are fed. That night, some shepherds were in the fields nearby watching their sheep. An angel of the Lord stood before them. The glory of the Lord was shining around them, and suddenly they became very frightened.

Reader 1: The angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, because I am bringing you some good news. It will be a joy to all the people. Today your Savior was born in David's town. He is Christ, the Lord. This is how you will know him: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a feeding box."

Reader 2: Then a very large group of angels from heaven joined the first angel. All the angels were praising God, saying: "Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace to the people who please God." (Luke 2:1-4 ICB)

Reader 3: We light the peace candle because we have hope that God is still with us and brings peace, love, and joy to this generation and the next.

Pastor Mandy: Would you pray with me?

Holy God, help us to listen to this story again this year, the same story that we've heard before. But help us to learn something new. Help us to change our hearts. Help us to follow you more. Help us to continue to listen to the story, to learn from the story until there is peace on Earth. God, you have sacrificed so much by sending your son to be with us.

We are so thankful for that gift, the gift of the baby, the baby boy wrapped in CLOs, lying in that feed box. God, we give you thanks and praise for giving us joy, for allowing us to gather, for praising you, and for giving us unending hope. We say all of this in Jesus name, Amen.