

Receiving the Light John 1:1-14

The problem with Christmas is that we already think we understand it. We already “get it” and so it no longer shocks us. It no longer floors our sensibilities. It no longer makes us stop and think and consider the course of our lives. Yet this is just the sort of impact Christmas, the incarnation of the Lord Jesus should have on our lives. After considering his coming to this earth our lives should never be the same again.

I had another question for our office Christmas party a few weeks ago. We didn’t just talk about our favorite gift; we talked about our favorite family tradition. Part of what makes Christmas so special is the traditions that we share with our families. What are the traditions that you share?

In my family growing up, our most annoying tradition related to rigid order associated with opening of the presents.

Indeed, even some of the pressures associated with coming to worship on a Sunday morning are related to adjusting these family traditions. Family is important to this great nation of the ole USA. I wrote down all of the TV shows I could think of that explored the family over the last 20-30 years: *Happy Days, All in the Family, The Jeffersons, Good Times, One Day at a Time, Eight Is Enough, The Brady Bunch, The Cosby Show, Family Ties, Full House, Home Improvement, etc.* As a culture, we like to explore this question about what is family all about. What makes successful families? How do we deal with the tragedies families face? How do we make life work as a family? It is just one of the love affairs that Americans have with themselves—the quest for the perfect American family.

Even so, there may be something good about the dislocation we feel this Christmas because it falls on a Sunday. The last time Christmas fell on a Sunday was 1994. Such dislocation and disruption forces us to consider does Christmas really have anything to say to my family.

I mentioned last week in our minute on worship about how Christmas relates to the family, but this week I want to delve deeper into this question. What we’re going to discover is that the core message of Christmas is all about family—who’s in and what it is?

Summary:

It is important for us to summarize where we have come in our study of John’s prologue:

- Jesus Comes To the darkness as the Light of Life
- Jesus Is Immanuel, God With Us Full of Grace and Truth
- Jesus is Hidden, except to Those Who Believe
- Jesus is the Good Stuff

Now we come to the verses 12-13, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

This is an important verse because it tells us the purpose of the incarnation. So far we have talked about what the incarnation is for and how we experience the incarnation, but we have not discussed its true, grand purpose. **John tells us that here—it is for family.**

God is making a new family in and through the person of Jesus Christ. This is why Christmas on Sunday is so important because we cannot reclaim family without consideration of our divine family in Christ.

Christmas is God’s own Home Improvement Initiative.

In fact, some translators have translated Jesus coming to “his own” in verse 11 as Jesus coming to his “own home.” That is, the idea here is that Jesus is coming to his first family, the Jewish nation, and they reject him. As a result, God begins a **New Family Initiative—a Home Improvement for all eternity.**

1) What it is?

What are the ties that bind?

Illustration: Boy Scouts making rope from twine

- **Three cords that will not hold:**

What are the cords that have failed to build enduring families of love? John identifies all of them: blood or race, sexual desire or romantic love and the will of a father or some sort of patriarchal influence. John recognizes that the family constituted by Christ will not find its strength in the cords rooted in our efforts.

We cannot approach God and his family in the accomplishments of ourselves.

- **Single cord of divine grace:**

John could not be clearer. He contrasts human efforts in building our way towards God, with God’s divine plan in rescuing us from ourselves. God’s family is created by his gracious birthing in Christ. John simply says we must be “born of God.”

“I never had the experience of looking for God. It was the other way around: He was the hunter (or so it seemed to me) and I was the deer. He stalked me...took unerring aim, and fired. And I am very thankful that this is how the first (conscious) meeting occurred. It forearms one against subsequent fears that the whole thing was only wish fulfillment. Something one didn’t wish for can hardly be that.” C. S. Lewis

Lewis helps us understand that Christmas is ultimately not about our plans for our family, but about God’s plans for his, plans that include us even when we weren’t expecting it.

“Our lives are so chaotic because in our arrogance we dwell on how our plans have been skewed. God had plans too.” Tim Keller.

I’m glad that Christmas has fallen on Sunday this year because it forces us to consider this very thing—our plans and His plans. My friends, it is because of His plans that there is a Christmas. The single cord of grace is what makes the family of God. It is his Home Improvement Initiative!

If you want to know what should change your life. It is the awareness that you are not your own, but that you have been bought at the price of the Son, who was rejected by men and by God, so you that might be saved. This is God’s renovation of the family!

2) Who’s in?

But John doesn’t leave us as mere spectators in the actions of the Divine. While he tells us that our membership is rooted in grace, it means, he tells us, is faith. Look what he writes in verse 13, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name...” In other words, God’s divine grace always manifests itself in a saving or trusting faith.

The family is a family of grace, but the badge we wear is that of faith. How do we know that we entered into grace? Only by forsaking all other ways in the family and looking in faith alone to the Light of Life.

Faith requires the conscious rejection of our pride in performance—religious deeds, secular accomplishment, worldly beauty, etc.

Illustration: Beauty contests and the talent aspects (growing up in a small town)

We don't just reject the most superficial means of accomplishment, we reject all of them as means to save ourselves or justify us before God and his family. Only absolute dependence upon Christ can be truly termed faith. Membership in the family is not Jesus making up for what I lack, it is Jesus standing my place—both in terms of performance and penalty.

I need a righteous performer and a sin-bearer! By emphasizing faith, God's family gets built upon a foundation that is out of this world. It is Christ!

In a lot of ways that show *Home Improvement* had many positive qualities. I think one of its best was the character Wilson. Wilson was Tim Taylor's neighbor. You never got a chance to look him in the face. All you ever saw was the tip of forehead with his fisherman's cap resting on top. But for what was lacking in visual representation was more than made up for in his sage wisdom. Wilson was the character who Tim sought out to understand his family. Each episode Tim would walk to his backyard fence and start his ritual conversation with Wilson. Wilson's advice was always worked.

In many ways, John's Gospel works like a Wilson. Here is divine advice from one we cannot see inviting us to build our families upon a new foundation—the foundation of faith alone by grace alone. Here is the counsel that we must heed for our earthly families to work. **Here is a Home Improvement Initiative for a New Family!**