

**Witness to the Light**  
**John 1.6-13**  
**Series: The Word Became Flesh**  
**Advent 2020**  
**December 13, 2020**

- I. Introduction
  - A. Confession
    - 1. I like to watch reruns of Law and Order
      - a. The original Law and Order
      - b. Not so much the spin-offs
      - c. No – the original series
      - d. It's like Sam Waterson and Jerry Orbach are old friends
  - B. I was watching one a week or so ago
    - 1. And it struck me how difficult it is for the prosecutors to get witnesses to testify
      - a. People who witness crimes don't want to testify
      - b. Some don't want to get involved – who has time to do all that?
      - c. Many are afraid
      - d. Afraid they'll be embarrassed during the cross examination
      - e. Afraid they'll have to reveal that they themselves were doing something illegal when they witnessed the crime
      - f. Afraid the perpetrator will have ways to injure or kill them or their family if they testify
    - 2. And I began to recall all the different methods prosecutors would use to get the witnesses to testify
      - a. They would plead with them to do the right thing
      - b. They would appeal to their sense of morality
      - c. They would lay a guilt trip on them that if they don't testify these evil criminals would go free and go harm other people
      - d. But they would also twist their arms
      - e. They would threaten them
      - f. Threaten to reveal secrets the witnesses themselves would like to keep under wraps
      - g. Threaten to charge them with crimes
    - 3. It's just really difficult to get witnesses to testify in criminal proceedings
  - C. But then again, it occurred to me that it's difficult to get witnesses of the saving work of Christ to testify
    - 1. Maybe we're afraid, too
      - a. Not so much of getting killed by a perpetrator – although that is a danger in many areas of the world where Christianity is persecuted
      - b. But afraid of losing friends
      - c. Afraid of being cast as a Bible-thumping, anti-intellectual, close-minded fundamentalists
      - d. Afraid of not being able to answer theological questions

- e. Afraid we'll mess up the gospel message
- f. Afraid we'll not be persuasive enough
- 2. Preachers don't have all the tools that prosecutors have to get people to testify for Jesus
  - a. But then, why should it be necessary to coax and cajole people who have been saved by the blood of Jesus?
  - b. People who have the greatest news imaginable?
- 3. Why should it be so difficult for us witnesses to testify to what Jesus has done in bringing us from death to life?
  - a. Seems like it ought to be easy, natural
- D. I thought of Jeremiah
  - 1. Jeremiah was called to testify – but his message was not good news
    - a. **Jeremiah 1:10** (NKJV) — 10 "... To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant."
    - b. 2/3rds of his message was negative
  - 2. He got tired of getting hammered by his friends and enemies for having to deliver the message that he was compelled to deliver
    - a. And he finally got to the place where he said, "That's it. I've had enough. I'm keeping my mouth shut."
  - 3. **Jeremiah 20:9** (NKJV) — 9 Then I said, "I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name." ...
    - a. "That's it – turning in my prophet's card. I'm done!"
  - 4. **Jeremiah 20:9** (NKJV) — 9 ... But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not.
    - a. Jeremiah couldn't keep it in
    - b. If he tried to keep it in, if he tried to keep the message to himself, he would explode
- E. Oh, that we would all have a fire in our bones to testify as witnesses to the grace of God in Jesus Christ – the Son of God incarnate!

## II. **Witness**

- A. In our Advent series we've been exploring John's theology of Christmas
  - 1. John, as we recall, doesn't include any of the details of the birth of Jesus
    - a. No angelic announcements
    - b. No journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem for a 9-month pregnant girl and her betrothed on a donkey
    - c. No "No Vacancy" sign at the motels in Bethlehem
    - d. No manger, surrounded by animals
    - e. No visitation by Magi from the East
    - f. None of the things we typically think of as the Christmas story
  - 2. But John does a magnificent job describing what Christmas is all about
    - a. It's about God with us
    - b. God coming in the flesh
    - c. About the incarnation
    - d. **John 1:14** (NKJV) — 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt

among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

3. John gives us the theology of Christmas, the meaning of Christmas
- B. And one of the things we learn from John in spades is that the message of Christmas needs to be proclaimed
  1. Witnesses need to testify
    - a. And the Gospel of John is all about the witnesses to the incarnation of Jesus
  2. Just think of the many witnesses to the incarnation in the Gospel of John
- C. Purpose statement
  1. **John 20:31** (NKJV) — 31 ... these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.
    - a. Signs – miracles – that Jesus did reveal perhaps the most important witness
  2. God Himself is the first witness to the incarnation
    - a. **Hebrews 2:4** (NKJV) — 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?
    - b. That's what the signs and wonders were all about – God was the first witness of the incarnation of Jesus
  3. **John 8:18** (NKJV) — 18 "... the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me."
- D. **Jesus Himself**
  1. **John 8:14** (NKJV) — 14 Jesus answered and said to them, "Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going..."
- E. **The works of Jesus**
  1. **John 10:25** (NKJV) — 25 "... The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me."
- F. **The scriptures**
  1. **John 5:39** (NKJV) — 39 "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me."
- G. **Men and women** who encountered the saving power of Jesus
  1. Samaritan woman
    - a. **John 4:29** (NKJV) — 29 "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"
  2. Man born blind
    - a. **John 9:25** (NKJV) — 25 He answered and said, "... One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see."
- H. **The disciples**
  1. **John 15:27** (NKJV) — 27 "And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning."
- I. **The Holy Spirit**
  1. **John 15:26** (NKJV) — 26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father,

He will testify of Me.”

- J. So the Gospel of John is a parade of witnesses
  - 1. Witnesses who are not afraid to speak about the incarnate Son of God
- K. One of the first witnesses to the incarnation introduced by John was John the Baptist
  - 1. **John 1:6–8** (NKJV) — 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.
- L. We talked a lot about the light last week
  - 1. “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men”
  - 2. The only way we know about the light of men
    - a. Is because of the all the witnesses to the light
    - b. First and foremost of those witnesses in this Gospel is John the Baptist

### III. **Response to the Witness**

- A. Before we get too involved in the text this morning, let’s unpack a bit the biblical word for “witness”
  - 1. **John 1:6–8** (NKJV) — 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 This man came for a **witness**, to bear **witness** of the Light, that all through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear **witness** of that Light.
    - a. Three times the word “witness” is used
    - b. Once it is a noun – John came for (or as) a witness
    - c. Twice it is a verb – to bear witness
  - 2. John was a witness
    - a. And he witnessed
  - 3. John was a witness who testified to the incarnation of the Son of God
- B. But witnessing can be dangerous
  - 1. Maybe there is something, after all, to the fear we sense as we think of about testifying
    - a. Maybe there is a connection with Law and Order – when a witness is afraid of testifying against a perpetrator out of fear that they’ll be killed
  - 2. Because after all – you know what happened to John the Baptist
    - a. His head was cut off and served on a platter by Herodias – Herod’s illicit wife whom he had taken from his brother Philip
  - 3. John the Baptist disapproved – it cost him his head
- C. **Gk – witness – marturia**
  - 1. Witness = martyr
  - 2. Witnessing can be dangerous
    - a. A death is involved
    - b. A dying to self is required
  - 3. John the Baptist witnessed and paid for his witness with his head

- a. How much have you given up in witnessing to the incarnate Son of God?
- D. How was this good news received?
1. How were the witnesses that we see in the Gospel of John – all those we described earlier – how were they regarded?
    - a. How did they regard the message of these witnesses?
- E. **John 1:6–11** (NKJV) — 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.
1. 9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.
- F. John uses the word “world” in a number of different ways in his gospel
1. In this case, “world” means all of creation, including all human beings
    - a. It’s quite a remarkable irony, isn’t it?
  2. **John 1:3** (NKJV) — 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.
  3. **John 1:4** (NKJV) — 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
  4. But though the world was made through Him, the world did not know Him
    - a. It’s as if a baby doesn’t know his own mother!
    - b. Flesh and blood – and yet there is no relationship, no connection
- G. Jesus came as the savior of this world
1. And this world did not recognize Him!
  2. He came and ministered in grace and in power – with signs and wonders
    - a. And this world was clueless to His identity
- H. Jesus would take it even farther than John
1. **John 15:18–19** (NKJV) — 18 “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”
  2. Not just that the world didn’t recognize Jesus
    - a. The world hated Jesus
  3. No wonder that to be a witness is to be a martyr
- I. The tragedy is even worse than that
1. **John 1:11** (NKJV) — 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.
  2. This is not the world in general – all people everywhere
    - a. This is Israel
    - b. The chosen people of God
    - c. The people of the covenant
    - d. The people of the scriptures
    - e. The people of the Law
    - f. The people of the temple
    - g. The people of the sacrifices

3. All of which point to Jesus as the incarnate Son of God
  - a. These are His people
  - b. He came to these His people – His fellow Hebrews
4. He came to His own – and His own did not receive Him
- J. So the overwhelming response of the witness of the incarnation is tragic
  1. The world – the pagan world – you might expect them to reject the witness of Jesus
    - a. They are the people who “walked in darkness” (Isaiah)
    - b. They are the morally corrupt
    - c. They are the spiritually bankrupt
    - d. No wonder they miss Jesus; no wonder they miss the incarnation
  2. But what about the religious people?
    - a. Why would they have refused to receive God incarnate?
  3. Religious people don’t want to ascribe glory to the Son of God
    - a. They want to keep the glory for themselves
    - b. They are the spiritually proud
    - c. Richard Phillips: They don’t want to trust and worship a Messiah; they want to be Messiahs; they want to be worshiped. Instead of humbling themselves before a Savior, the moral achievers want to be glorified for their own works.
- K. Phillips summarizes: The irreligious love darkness because it provides a cover for their sin. But the religious unbeliever loves darkness because it makes him seem so much better by comparison.
  1. In the dark, the light of a candle shines brightly. But when the full, blazing light of the sun rises up, candles are shown up as the dim lights they are.
  2. [Jesus Christ]... exposes the dimness of every other supposed light and shows even the religious people’s need for a Savior.
- L. Tragic, isn’t it?
  1. John comes to be a witness to the light
    - a. That all through him might believe
  2. But both the irreligious and the religious both reject the light
    - a. Satisfied to live in darkness of one kind or another

#### IV. **Fruit of the Witness**

- A. But not everyone!
  1. **John 1:11–12** (NKJV) — 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:
  2. There are, indeed, some who receive Him
    - a. Not everyone rejects the incarnate Son of God
    - b. Not everyone fails to recognize the Savior who is Christ the Lord
- B. **Receive Him**
  1. Often misunderstand the concept of “receive”
    - a. It seems in our English idiom to be rather perfunctory
    - b. Kind of ordinary, run-of-the-mill receiving, like a business getting a

- package in the mail
2. Jan in our office does most of the receiving
    - a. When a UPS or FedEx delivery person shows up in the office, sticks his or her head in the window and says they have a package, Jan is usually the one who receives it, signs for it if that's necessary
    - b. But I've never seen her jump out of her chair with excitement, run over to the agent, and express her great delight and pleasure in the package that is being delivered
    - c. She surely doesn't hug the guy!
    - d. Usually, neither the delivery person nor Jan knows what's in the package
    - e. And it's probably not for Jan anyway – it's probably for someone else on staff or for some ministry
    - f. But Jan dutifully receives it and makes sure it gets to the right person
    - g. That's one kind of receiving
  3. Another kind of receiving is what happens in a reception
    - a. Like a wedding reception
    - b. When the newlywed couple is received
    - c. The anticipation has reached its climax
    - d. The wait is over
    - e. The excitement is palpable
    - f. And when the couple arrives – usually later than they should have because the photographer has gotten carried away
    - g. But when the couple arrives, everyone cheers – thrilled to be celebrating the glorious occasion when two have become one
    - h. There are toasts; there's dancing; there's music!
    - i. Now that's receiving
  4. When Jesus is received, it's not like Jan signing for a package in the office that isn't meant for her anyway
    - a. It's like man wandering in the desert who stumbles into an oasis, with springs flowing with water
    - b. It's like the woman who's lost her coin, who desperately searches her house, and when she finds it she celebrates its discovery
    - c. It's like the prodigal son coming home, who when the father sees him, he kills the fattened calf and celebrates with a feast
    - d. Receiving Jesus is like a man finding a buried treasure in a field, and who having found it, sells all he has, buys the field so he can receive the treasure
  5. Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, is the pearl of great price
    - a. He's the most valuable of all treasures
    - b. He's the most precious gift imaginable
    - c. He's all that the human heart could ever long for
  6. "But as many as received Him..."
    - a. Don't sell this receiving short

- b. Don't misunderstand what is happening in receiving Jesus
  - c. If you have received Him, you know that your heart nearly explodes with joy and gratitude
  - d. Receiving Jesus in that sense becomes the fuel for genuine witness
- C. "To them He gave the right to become children of God"
- 1. Do you realize what privileges come to those who aren't mere hired servants, but members of the family of God?
  - 2. We have the privilege of experiencing God's fatherly love
    - a. Many struggle with understanding God as father – perhaps there was an absent father, an abusive father, or even just an errant father
    - b. But to become children of God is to experience the love of the perfect Father – the Father you never had
  - 3. We have the privilege of inheriting God's eternal glory
    - a. Romans 8:17 (NKJV) — 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...
  - 4. We have the privilege of intimate access to God the Father through prayer
    - a. We have a Father who always listens, always hears
    - b. There is no obstacle or barrier to God in communication and communion with Him
    - c. As long as we confess our sin and cast ourselves on the mercy of Jesus
  - 5. We also have the privilege of the loving discipline of the Father
    - a. Hebrews 12:6 (NKJV) — 6 "For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."
    - b. Our earthly fathers never disciplined someone else's children; they only disciplined their own
    - c. God the Father disciplines His own children
    - d. So that they will become like the incarnate Son of God, Jesus
  - 6. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God
- D. "To those who believe in His name..."
- 1. Believe – faith in Jesus
    - a. Trust in the incarnate Son of God
  - 2. Do you trust in Jesus?
    - a. Do you take His righteousness as your own because you realize you don't have any of your own righteousness to offer?
    - b. Do you accept His death on the cross in your place? Do you trust in His taking upon Himself the just wrath of God on the cross on your behalf – the wrath that you genuinely deserved?
  - 3. Faith is the means by which we become true children of God
    - a. Do you have that kind of faith?
- E. And who are these people who receive Him? Who are these people who become children of God? Who are those who believe in His name?
- 1. John 1:13 (NKJV) — 13 ...who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.



2. These are not people who have the right ancestry
    - a. 23 and Me won't help you
    - b. Ancestry.com is not the key to finding your true Father
  3. These are not the people who are self-made men or women, who have pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps and made something of themselves
    - a. "Nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man"
    - b. These are not people who think they can will themselves into a relationship with God
  4. "Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"
    - a. These are those who are born again
    - b. **Born of the Spirit**
- F. If you're born of the Spirit of God, all of a sudden this Jesus
1. Who appeared to you to be an inconsequential blip on the radar screen of history
    - a. Who even seemed to you to be offensive to your values
  2. All of a sudden this Jesus appears to you as the lily of the valley, the bright morning star
    - a. He seems like the pearl of great price
    - b. The treasure of your soul
- G. So if you're born again, you cast yourself on the mercy of this Savior
1. This incarnate Son of God
    - a. And you receive Him with great affection, gratitude, celebration
- H. And you can't wait to be His witness, to testify on His behalf

V. Conclusion

- A. Christmas is about joy
  1. About a joy which is shared
  2. A joy in which the witnesses testify willingly and delightfully
    - a. Without hesitation
    - b. Without hindrance
- B. Witnesses who are willing to lose everything – even to be martyred
  1. Because Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is worth it