

Second Sunday of Christmas  
January 2, 2011  
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Emanuel Lutheran Church (ELCA), Dallas, Texas, USA

*Scriptures: Jeremiah 31:7-14, Psalm 147:12-20, Ephesians 1:3-14, John 1:1-18*

### **Jesus Is God**

Who told you first about God? Who was the first person that tried to explain to you that there is such a thing as God? Was it your mother, your grandfather, your Sunday school teacher? When that person told you about God, what did she say? Did she try to explain that God can be everywhere, and that God knows everything, and that God has always existed? Did that person say that God is the one who created everything; you know animals, and water, and plants, and even people? How did you learn about God for the first time in your life? Maybe for you it wasn't an early childhood experience. Maybe you didn't even hear about God until you were older. It does happen. A friend of mine told me once that she was not going to bring her baby to be baptized because that's a decision he has to make for himself when he's capable of doing so. "I'm not going to make him be a Christian"—she said being very sure that she is doing a service to her little baby—"he will choose if he wants to be one when he's old enough." And I thought to myself, well maybe she shouldn't make him go to school either, or take him to the doctor, or tell him that he needs to love his family, since all those should really be his decisions to make.

Okay, okay; I'm being a little sarcastic here, but I'm just trying to make sense of something that doesn't make sense to me. Anyway, the point is that some people have not known about God until later in their lives. Maybe your first lesson about God was from one of those billboards on the road. You know, the ones that are signed, "God." And you are left there wondering who that god guy is that pays for all those expensive billboards. How did you learn who God is?

I'll tell you a little bit of my own story. I don't have a very clear memory of mom or grandma telling me about God. That's not to say they didn't; I'm sure they talked about God all the time, but maybe I wasn't paying too much attention. Nevertheless I do remember being eight years old or so and my Sunday school teacher talking about God. She said that God was light and that God was life. And the reason I remember that is because she wrote it on the blackboard. But she not only wrote it, she did so in big capital letters and I was old enough to know that that meant it is was important. Heck, it might even show up on a test so you better learn that stuff. So I kept repeating to myself "God is light and life, God is light and life, God is life and light..." But the lesson was not over yet. She also wrote in the blackboard that Jesus is God. And this time she circled it, and underlined it, and put asterisks, and the whole caboodle. Now I knew this was going to be the very first question in the test! So God is light and life and Jesus is God. Maybe I didn't understand the concept of God been light and life, but I sure could understand that Jesus is God. Now I could put a face to a name. I had seen pictures of Jesus so now I knew what God looked like.

At eight years of age I was told that God was light and life. At eight years of age I was told that Jesus was God. At eight years of age I was told that God had come into the

world in the shape of Jesus to show us how much God loved us. And at eight years of age I believed it with the same confidence that I believed the Three Kings come on January sixth to bring gifts. How is an eight year old child able to believe things like that? Because. You don't question it; you just believe it. You may not totally understand it but if someone you love and cares for you says so it must be true. Besides, it's written in the Bible and everything in the Bible is true. That was also a given. At eight years of age, faith was easy. There are no reasons not to believe. When everything around you is a given, you just go with the flow. You don't even realize it when you are eight, but basically what you are doing is trusting that things are; even God.

The gospel of John is known for being the most allegorical of all four gospels. It's more ethereal, less concrete than say Luke who tries to base his account on factual stories, or Matthew who is more intent on showing the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. Instead of accounts of what or how it happened you get more ideas and concepts. Take Christmas for example. It would be very difficult to put together a children's program based on John. There is no baby lying in a manger. There are no parents traveling to Bethlehem. There are no angels or shepherds. There is no star or magi. John doesn't give us much of a historical account of Christmas; instead he gives us a confession of faith about the incarnation of God. John isn't so concerned about exactly what happened in Bethlehem during the reign of Caesar Augustus (or King Herod). He is much more concerned about revealing Jesus' divine nature. And in order to do so he goes back to the beginning, and by beginning I mean even before things were created. In that time and place that has no calendar year or physical location there was only the Word. The Creative Mind, the Being, the One, God. And from that Divine ever-existing presence, it all begins to unravel.

Now, if you thought that the virginal conception, or the angels singing on high, or the magi following a star was difficult to understand, try wrapping your mind around what John is saying here. It defies our imagination and knowledge. It goes well beyond what we can explain in a simple story. Nevertheless, for all the deep and profound meaning that the gospel of John has, when you think about it, it's very easy to understand. Or maybe I should say that to be able to understand it you actually have to avoid thinking about it. Because in fact John is not trying to explain it to you, John is simply telling you: Jesus is God. And what do you do with that? Your options are simple. You either believe it or you don't. That's how it works for children. There is no middle ground.

Faith was easy when I was eight years old. As an adult, faith is not necessarily more difficult, but I have put more obstacles in front of it. Through the years, as one grows in intellect, faith gets challenged. We try to reason it, to explain it, to understand it. By doing so, we run the risk of ending up with a bigger mess in our minds and maybe an empty space in our hearts. That's why at the time of Jesus coming there were those who did not believe in him, because they couldn't figure it out; they couldn't accept the idea of God coming in such a way. "But—says John—to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." I don't know what else I can add to that. I don't know how to put it in layman's terms. I don't know what to do with it other than treasure it and believe it just like an eight year old would do. God has come into the world. His name is Jesus. Amen.