

A Man Sent from God  
 a sermon by David Roquemore  
 First Presbyterian Church, Newton  
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John 1: 5-14

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Here we have the statement about Jesus Christ: he is the light, that comes and brings life to all people. The darkness, the enemy, has not, and cannot, overcome it, overcome him. That alone is good news!

So in verse 8, we have another statement, this one about John the Baptizer: He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

John was a witness, one who testifies to what he has seen, who tells others about the one who is coming, about the light that is in the world.

In vv 12 -14 we have the testimony that ties all of this together.

Yet to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Remember the commercials where the people's heads would explode in a puff of purple smoke? That is the reaction among the Greeks when they read this. They are doing just fine until they get to "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The Logos became flesh? Whaaaaaaaat? I don't think so. POOF!

(Incidentally, those commercials were for Jet.com, an internet retail site, now absorbed by the colossus that is Walmart. The only thing left are the brilliant mind-blown purple commercials!)

Anyway, notion that the Word, the Logos, could become human flesh is just short of ridiculous. Imagine someone saying that "mathematics became meat and dwelt among us." We'd walk away thinking someone has just hopped aboard the crazy train! But that is what it says! The verse is talking about the incarnation, that Jesus Christ came, was born, grew up, learned a trade, worked, then preached, cured the sick, and was finally arrested and crucified, killed, buried, and was also God!

That is what we are challenged to believe: that God, the Almighty, the Holy One of Israel, came down and lived a human life among us, in a particular time and place, with a particular set of prejudices and customs, and then died for our sins!

We have inherited from Augustine this notion that "died for our sins" should be interpreted juridically, in a judicial framework, in legal terms, in terms of punishment and retribution. Someone has to pay!

But who gets paid, exactly? The Devil? I don't think so. I don't think he has that much power. God? What, God is angry, or offended, and has to be appeased by the death of an innocent? No, I don't buy that either. So how does it work?

Generations of Calvinist preachers talked about this until Jonathan Edwards outdid them all with, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." That talk of God taking pleasure in the agony of sinners roasting over the flames of hell may have terrified New Englanders, but it still isn't right. It isn't the whole picture!

Yes, there is scriptural warrant for some of these things. You aren't exactly wrong if you believe them. But I think a better framework for understanding the cross is not the judicial one. A better model to use is a medical one. God came into the world to save sinners, to cure the disease that runs rampant among us, the disease of sin. Somehow, the cross does that!

On the cross Jesus dies. The human nature he has taken on dies, and so he takes our human nature to the grave. We die with him. He is raised, and so are we, or we will be. In that way, the cure takes effect. We are freed from sin and death!

This is why he came, why he became incarnate in the first place: to save us from sin and death, and bring us into life with him.

Back to verse 8: John the Baptizer came as a witness to all of this, to point to him, so that the crowds can understand who he is and why he has come. John the Baptizer is also called John the Forerunner. We might also call him John the Witness. John bears witness to the coming of Jesus, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ of God.

It says that he came so that all might believe in Jesus through him. And all who believe, of course, receive the power to become children of God. So John has a key role in this plan of salvation. He is the proclaimer. He brings to us the truth of who Christ is and what God is up to.

He does this because the world does not recognize Jesus when he comes. The world is busy expecting someone different; someone who comes with a shout and a blast of trumpets. Someone who comes conquering the enemies, especially the Romans. The world expected, and continues to want, a leader who will take care of every problem and dominate the enemies.

But that is not who Jesus is, nor why he comes. He *does* come to destroy the last enemy, death, but not the way that people expect at all. He destroys death by letting it have its say, then rising again!

So John the Baptizer proclaims this Jesus. And we are then called to imitate him, to proclaim him as well. He is the light, and we are called to point to the light. The light comes to enlighten everyone, the whole world. The light comes to chase away the dark. The light comes to flood sinful places with its warmth and beauty. The light comes and the darkness cannot overcome it!

Thanks be to God! Amen.