

Title: Joy in the midst of darkness / FCBC / Dec. 16

Passage: John 1:1-18

[Intro and prayer]

Joy, is one of the most common emotions that many of us feel during the Christmas season. There's joy when we gather around to put up the Christmas tree and hang up our treasures of ornaments. There's joy when we give presents and receive presents on Christmas morning. There's joy when families who lives far away come home and spends time together. And, (perhaps not the in Chinese culture, but in the Western culture), there's joy for those whom been waiting all year to wear their ugly sweater, and they finally get to do it.

This is true for our family as well (Not the ugly sweater part, all of my sweaters are in style BTW). In Vancouver, when the snow really starts to fall, it's time for hot chocolate and Christmas songs. One of Josiah's favorite songs is *Jingle Bells*. Couple of Christmas ago, he demands for it to be on repeat all-day-long. And you know that kids only have one volume, so at the top of his lungs, he would yell...I mean sing " Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells..." Over, and over, and over again.

There is plenty joy during Christmas.

But if we look hard enough or lived long enough, we know that there's plenty of darkness during Christmas too. By darkness I mean disappointments, sadness, pain, illness, and loss – the challenges that we all face in life.

What do you say to the young woman who feels rejected and have been disappointed by others again and again? How can she have joy? What do you say to the young husband whose wife is being worn down by sickness? How can he have joy? What do you say to the single mother of 2 who are struggling to keep food on the table? How can they have joy? There are countless other examples: What do you say to the family who lost their home to California wildfire? What do you say to the families of victims of mass shootings? Because our world is broken, we know there are people around us (perhaps we ourselves), that are in the midst of darkness during this season.

Sometimes darkness can be even more overwhelming when **we look to further away**. Sin leads to wickedness. Wickedness leads to the horrible evils like human trafficking or oppressive poverty or persecution. What do you say to Elizabeth, a young girl who was tricked and trafficked to a place far away from home so that others can take advantage of her? OR What do you say to Marco, whose family is so entrenched in poverty, that his work is to jump from one garbage truck to another to find recycle things to sell? What do you say to Christians around the world who are persecuted? Just this past week, I read a report of church members being arrested and their pastor imprisoned in China. How can they have joy in this Christmas season?

Sometimes darkness seems overwhelming. What do we do? How can we have joy?

[BIG IDEA] Our passage this morning tells us that we can have joy in the midst of darkness because of Jesus Christ has come into the world!

Turn with me to the Gospel of John chapter 1.

Our passage this morning is **very unique**. It is unique because this passage is that it is a **prologue** to the whole gospel.

What is a **prologue**? A prologue is an introduction to the whole book. A prologue alerts the reader to what's about to come. It highlights the key themes of the whole book.

In other words, a prologue is like a **movie trailer**. When you watch a movie trailer, what do you get? You usually see all the main characters. You see the contours of the plot. You see the tensions. You see all the substantial themes of the movie, right?

Or you can think about these verses in another way, one commenter compared this prologue as a **driveway leading up to a grand mansion**. At different points on the way, there are signs with pictures of the room and people that are waiting for you at the mansion.¹ All along, you are given a glimpse of what's to come.

A prologue. A movie trailer. A long driveway. If you pay attention to these verses, you will see all the key themes of the entire gospel – Light and darkness, faith and unbelief, born again and eternal life, grace and truth, Father and Son – in this passage.

In this prologue, **we see four reasons in why we can have joy even in the midst of darkness**. If you are in the midst of a challenge, difficult, dark time, these are for you.

The **FIRST** reason we can have joy in the midst of darkness is because **Jesus is Lord of all**.

Look with me at verse 1. Here John first tells us about the **Word**. You might have heard that this word is translated from the Greek word *logos*. In John's time, *logos*, is a commonly used word that has different meaning for different groups of people.

This is an imperfect illustration, but think about the word "apple." To some people, the word apple means a delicious look red apple. But others might think of the logo Apple, related to i-phones, macs. But still others might think about the company, it's founders, Steve Jobs. You see, different people can have different ideas about this one word.

¹ NT Wright, NT for everyone

It's similar for the word *logos* in John's time. The Greek philosophers had their own ideas about *logos*. The Jewish tradition had their own thoughts about the word. But for the apostle John, the word *logos* was used in a much different way. He says **three things** about the Word.

The first thing we notice in verse 1 is that the **Word was in the beginning**. When you hear these words "in the beginning", what does it immediately remind you of? The book of Genesis. In the creation story, the book of Genesis begins with these definitive words: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth."

Here John writes: "In the beginning was the Word." John is telling us that the Word was there **before** the very beginning of human existence. Before Adam and Eve, the Word was. He was there before the very first dawn of light. Before the Sun and the moon ever sparkled, the Word was. He was there before the hand of the clock ever ticked its very first beat. Before time, the Word was.

The second thing we notice is that the **Word was with God**. The word "with" can also give a meaning of "toward." One commentator suggests that the verse can be translated as the "the Word was faced toward God." This means that the Word was in "intimate relationship with God."² Later on in verse 18 we learn that the Word was at his Father's side. It says that the Word was "in the closest relationship with the father." Did you catch that? "Closest relationship."

Not only is the Word before all things. Not only is the Word in a closest relationship with God. But the **third thing we notice** is that **the Word was God**. "Wait a minute," you ask, "how can the Word be with God and was God?" Here lies one of the most concise statements about the mystery of the Trinity. The Word is separated from God, but he is also God. One famous theologian said, "What God was, the Word also was."³ The Word was God.

In just one short verse, we come to see that the Word is someone that our small human minds can barely understand. He was there before there was time. He was in a close relationship with God. And He, in fact, is God.

But that is not all. **John continues to tell us about the Word**. In verse 3, John says that the Word is the **Creator**. "All things were made through him," John said. The Sun and the moon, the trees and leaves, the oceans and mountains. He made those. The roses we smell, the food/cha-shui that we eat, the dogs and cats in our home, man and woman. Yup, he made those too. Every single thing that we can see, hear, touch, smell was created by and through and for the Word. The Word is all-creative and all-powerful.

² Tyndale commentary

³ Moloney

And there is more. John tells us that in this Word, **is the light and life**. Because he is light, he shines in the darkness and gives light to others. Like a lighthouse that shines out and penetrates the dark of night and guides its ships to safety, **the Word penetrates the darkness of the world and overcomes it**. Because he shares his life with God, he can give life to others.⁴

By now, you must be wondering, “Who is this Word?” John tells us in verse 16. **The Word that we have been talking about is none other than, Jesus Christ.**

In John 8:12, Jesus says: “*I am the **light** of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the **light** of life.*” (NIV) **Jesus is the light.**

In John 6:35, Jesus says: “*I am the bread of **life**. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.*” (NIV) Or in 11:25 when he says that “*I am the resurrection and the **life**. The one who believes in me will **live**, even though they die.*” (NIV) Or in 4:10 when he declared that that he is the “*living water*” in the conversation with the Samaritan woman. **Jesus is life.**

And in Colossians 1:16-17, the apostle Paul wrote: “¹⁶ *For in (Jesus Christ) all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.* ¹⁷ *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*” **Jesus is the creator and sustainer of all.**

What does this mean? In the first 5 verses, John is shouting to us: “**Jesus is the LORD**”. He is Lord of creation and time. He is Lord of life as he gives life. He is Lord of darkness as He gives light to all. Jesus Christ is LORD of the entire universe. Have you heard of this song? “He’s got the whole world in his hands...” These verses are telling us that not only does Jesus have the whole world, but he the whole universe and all of us in his hand.

We can have joy in the midst of darkness because Jesus is the Word, the Light, and the Life. He is sufficient, and more powerful than any darkness that we face. Jesus is LORD of all.

Story: At a missions conference⁵, I heard about Elizabeth’s story. Elizabeth, the young girl who was trafficked that I told you about earlier, was eventually rescued by workers of a non-profit organization called International Justice Mission. As they examined the room where she was being held, they found something very surprising on the wall. On the wall, they found Psalm 27 engraved on it. It reads: “*The Lord is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life - of whom shall I be afraid?*” Even in her darkest moments, Elizabeth knew that darkness has not overcome the light. She knew that Jesus is

⁴ John 10:30

⁵ Urbana 2006, Sharon Cohn Wu – IJM

Lord even in the darkness that she was going through. She knew that she was not alone.

What kind of darkness are you experiencing in life right now? Is it an illness? Is it a disappointment? Is it that you have waited and waited? Are you afraid of the future about something? Jesus is God, and He is sufficient for you. He is more powerful than that disappointment, that illness, that suffering, that fear. As the Lord of all, Jesus is in control. **Jesus is in control, therefore you and I do not need to be. We can trust in him.**

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The **SECOND** reason that we can have joy in the midst of darkness is because Jesus understands our challenges.

In Verse 14, John writes: *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”*

The word flesh in this verse literally means “this” – flesh, bones, blood – human. It means that the Word has come into this world, taking up the form of a human being. This should startle us. If not, we need to read it until it does. Remember the Word that we were just talking about? The Word that existed before time; the Word that created everything that you and I see; the Word that is light and life to everything that we know and comprehend. Well, this verse just told us that this all powerful, all creating, all life giving Word, has come into this world as a human being. The all mighty Word is no longer away, or apart or distance, **in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God as entered into the fullness of human existence.**

The Word became flesh, “made his dwelling among us.” What does that mean? The word dwelling literally means “pitching a tent” or “tabernacle.” This echoes to what the Israelites experienced while they were in the wilderness. In Exodus 40:34-38, God’s glory was said to have filled the tabernacle and this signifies that his presence was with the Israelites. John here is saying that just as God tabernacle among the Israelites, now, God is tabernacling among us in the person of Jesus Christ.⁶ Just as the glory of God filled the tabernacle in Exodus, John says that God’s glory tabernacles in His Son, Jesus Christ.

When we are going through challenges, we always want to ask “why.” But the truth is that we might never know “why,” but we know one thing. We know that Jesus came. In his incarnation, God shows us that he knows the pain and suffering that all human beings experience, because he has also experienced them as a human being.

The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is our great high priest who understands our suffering and pains. Chapter 4, verse 15 reads: *“For we do not have a high*

⁶ Tyndale; New Bible Commentary

priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”

You see, **Jesus understands**. He understands the darkness in the world and the darkness that you and I are facing **because** he has gone through it himself and overcame them. Being human, Jesus experienced the warmth of a good meal, the love of friendships, the excitement of a surprise, **but** he also experienced the cold of homelessness, the burden of sickness, the suffering of hunger, the rejection from friends, the agony of being misunderstood, the feeling of loneliness, the emotions of mourning the loss of a friend, the horrors of persecution and the pain of death. He knows, he understands, the darkness of the world and the darkness that you and I are going through infinitely more than we can ever imagine.

Story: Marco, the boy that I told you about earlier was not just my imagination. On a mission trip, he told me how he used to be a “jumper.” He would literally jump from one garbage truck to another so that he can find bottles and plastics to trade in for money. One day, he invited Monica and I to visit his sister and her family in the slums. I still remember the ladder that I used to climb up into a small wooden home that’s no bigger than our American-sized bathroom. That experience was hard for me to swallow. How can this family have joy, having so little, stuck in oppressive poverty for generations? Then I remembered one of the local pastors words: “What these boys and girls needs are not just material help, what they really need is Jesus Christ.” And you know what, this is exactly what this verse is talking about. Jesus Christ came in our world full of sin, pain, sufferings, and darkness, not unlike the neighborhood that my friend Marco’s family lived. One paraphrase translation says: “*The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.*”⁷ That includes Marco’s neighborhood. He understands what Marco is going through.

Do you know that Jesus understands your neighborhood? Do you know that He understands the darkness that you are going through?

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The **THIRD** reason that we can have joy in the midst of darkness is because Jesus lets us know and see God.

Verse 18 tells us that **Jesus has revealed the Father to us**. “*No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God, is in the closest relationship with the Father*” (NIV). Remember what we talked about in verse one? The Word was with God and was God? The Word, Jesus Christ, “has made the him (the Father) known.”

The magnitude of this verse could not be overstated. Think about it, no single human being since the beginning of the world has seen God. In Exodus 33:18-23, we find that the only human being ever even came close to seeing God was

⁷ *The Message* by Eugene Peterson

Moses. But even in that instance, God tells Moses that “no man can see God’s face and live.” Moses was only allowed to see the back, the passing glory of God in that story. Moses, one of the holiest man ever lived on the face of the earth, a person that God spoke to as to a friend⁸, even he did not have the chance to see God and the full measure of His glory.

But for you. Me. What was hidden and beyond the grasp is now available to you and me because of Jesus Christ! This is what John in saying in verse 14, John said “we have seen his glory.” He and the disciples have seen God’s glory, in the person of Jesus Christ, full of “grace and truth.” We cannot see God, but because Jesus is God and “in the closest relationship with the Father,” Jesus has expounded God to us! Jesus lets us know and see God.

I recently came across a really interesting video. The video showed the first reaction of people who are colorblind, seeing colors for the first time in their lives. Using a special pair of glasses, they were able to see the world of colors. I wish you can see their reactions. They were priceless. One person said, “wait is this the real world?” Many just broke down crying. The colors they were seeing were just too overwhelming, too beautiful.

It’s the same for us, before none of us was able to see the glory of God, but because of Jesus’s coming into the world. Jesus has **revealed** the Father to us!

Brothers and sisters, this should bring us incredible joy. The stories about Jesus recorded in this book, are **not** just myths or fables, they are recordings of God’s character, love, actions, feelings toward humanity. So when you open the bible next time, and you read about Jesus, know that what you are reading is Jesus revealing the God to you. And when you are in the midst of suffering and pain, go back to the see how Jesus cared for, healed, loved those who are suffering and you will find incredible hope and joy!

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The **fourth and last reason** that we can have joy in the midst of darkness is because Jesus has given us the right to become God’s children.

Verses 10-13 tell us that about this incredible gift. ¹⁰ *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.* ¹¹ *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*” The Word who created everything came to his own creation, but was rejected. They didn’t accept and couldn’t comprehend him. We see this throughout the Gospel, a lot of people did not understand nor received Jesus.

But the verse continues: ¹² *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—* ¹³ *children*

⁸ Ex. 33:11

born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

Jesus Christ in his incarnation, not only revealed the Father to us, **but he opened up the possibility for those who believe him to become children of God.**

Notice the word "all" in this verse. Anyone, rich, poor, man, woman, sinners, healthy, disabled. No class, no race, no status can rob you of this right that is offered in Jesus Christ. **Brothers and sisters, He came, so that we can become His.** This is one of the greatest reason for joy, even when we are in the thick of darkness, is that when we receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, Jesus gives us the right to become God's children. As His child, sin no longer has a hold over you, your can have a relationship with God now, and you will experience life eternal.

In a conversation with a religious leader Nicodemus, Jesus declares that for one to be saved, he must become a child of God, be born again of the Spirit.⁹ Later on Jesus tells Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." When someone becomes God's child, he or she receives the gift of eternal life.

Brothers and sisters, do you realize that very fabric of reality has been changed because of Jesus's coming into the world? Think about it, if there was no Christmas, if Jesus Christ has not come, you and I would have **no hope**. We would still be in darkness. Suffering and pain is all there is to it. **Death wins.** But because "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us," we have hope, darkness does not overcome the light, suffering and pain will eventually cease, and eventual the "sting of death" is destroyed on the Cross.

You know, death is not an "if," but a "when" for all of us. Father time will eventually catch each and every single one of us. But innately, you and I know that there's something deeply wrong about death. We look at death and we say, "this cannot be it." You are right, because "God has set eternity in the human heart."¹⁰ You and I were made for eternity. The famous preacher, A.W. Tozer once said: "*God created our souls to be satisfied only with the divine everlastingness of the Word made flesh.*"¹¹ That is the gift that Jesus Christ offers to us in his coming into the world. He offers us himself and this gift to become God's child.

Over this past year, two spiritual giants of the Christian faith died – the famous world-traveling evangelist Billy Graham and pastor/theologian, the author of The Message translation of the bible, Eugene Peterson. I want to share two quotes from them as they thought about death and were nearing death.

⁹ John 3:1-8

¹⁰ Ecclesiastes 3:11

¹¹ A. W. Tozer, *And He Dwelt among Us* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, 2014), 28.

On death, Billy Graham once said – *“Some day you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God.”*

Eugene Peterson, his final words before death was simply, *“let's go.”*

Can you hear the anticipation of eternal joy in their voices?

Both of these men understood clearly what we have been talking about this morning. They understood that the coming Jesus Christ into the world has changed everything. For Christians, trials, persecution, pain, suffering, illness is not the end. When we become God's children, death is not the end. It is only the beginning into eternal Joy. That's because Jesus Christ **is** the end. In Rev. 22:13 Jesus says, *“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last, the beginning and the end.”*¹² In the beginning was the Word, at the end is also the Word.

As we end, I want you to think about the two questions that are listed at the end of your handout.

First, to my friends who have not made a decision to follow Jesus, are you ready to become a child of God? Verses 10-12 makes it clear that a choice is to be made, will you receive and accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God? Or will you reject him? God has given us himself in Jesus; will you decide to give yourself to him today?

Second, as a child of God, how is Jesus giving you joy during this Christmas? This passage tells us that in Jesus' coming, we know that we are not alone even in the darkest, most difficult times of our lives. We know that Jesus Christ understands our pain and suffering because he himself became human. We must remember that as a child of God, your eternal address is not here. It is in the presence of God.

[Prayer]

¹² Rev. 22:13