

Christmas 1, Year A

- I was at Target yesterday with my family, picking up a few things, including some additional presents that my sons wanted to buy with the Christmas money their family had sent
- For those of you keeping track, the date yesterday was December the 28th
- And as I was walking through on our usual circuit, I came through the seasonal section
- And so I can tell you that if you're looking to stock up on Valentines, I know just where to find them
- Of course, on our church calendar, it is still Christmas – for another whole week, even
- But the rest of the world is already moving, already on to the next thing
- Already starting to forget what Christmas was even supposed to mean according to the rules that they made up about it
- We are, it sometimes seems, the only ones interested in dwelling in this season any longer than we have to – and that's a season that even for us, is only a short twelve days long
- But me, I just can't get enough of Advent and Christmas
- In fact, I've been thinking for weeks not about our Advent study
- On Thursday nights during Advent, we did a study of three different classic Anglican Advent hymns
- And the one we started with was "Comfort, comfort ye my people", that beautiful paraphrase of Isaiah chapter 40
- And while the entire hymn is just a masterpiece, it's the fourth verse specifically that's been sticking with me since we first talked about it a few weeks ago
- That's the verse that goes:

Make ye straight what long was crooked,
make the rougher places plain;
let your hearts be true and humble,
as befits his holy reign.
For the glory of the Lord
now o'er earth is shed abroad;
and all flesh shall see the token
that his word is never broken.
- More particularly, it's those last two lines: "all flesh shall see the token / that his word is never broken"

- God's word is never broken, the hymn says
- God's promises are true
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- At first glance, the story that John tells in this first chapter of his Gospel seems a little esoteric – it seems like the story of the eternal Word of God being made flesh isn't as practical, maybe not even as applicable a story as the story of the Annunciation and the birth of Jesus Christ
- It's possible to read it and think that John is only making a theological point, perhaps even an obscure one
- Or sometimes we read this and think that John is so interested in painting a portrait of Christ's divinity, that it's hard to see the humanity at all in this story he tells
- I mean, the only words that John records about the actual birth of Jesus Christ are those words that are by now so familiar: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us"
- Nothing about a baby, nothing about a birth, nothing about a manger or an inn
- Just an eternal Word, the one that created the world, being made flesh
- But more than any of the other Gospels, even more those with more human, more picturesque depictions of the birth of Christ, it is John the Evangelist who tells us why it really matters when he says:
- "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God."
- That's just one of a couple of extremely important promises that can be found in John's prologue this morning
- The promise that we are, through faith in Christ's name, made beloved children of God
- That no matter who we are or where we come from or what we've done – we are a part of God's family
- All of those things only describe us, they don't define us
- We are defined by one thing, and one thing alone – the only thing that matters
- We are all, every one of us, beloved children of God
- That's something we forget about each other from time to time, and forget about ourselves probably every bit as often:
- We are beloved of God, and part of God's own family
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- There's one other promise found in our Gospel reading, too, though, that I think is important during this season of Christmas:
- "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."
- It's like we're playing parts in a movie where the ending has already been spoiled
- Sure, we might face trouble, hardship, even dire danger and awful suffering
- But we know how God's story ends
- No matter what happens, no matter how dark it might sometimes seem, no matter how dire things might appear – we know that God's light will keep shining, the darkness will not overcome the light
- God's love and light will prevail
- Those promises are what it means that the Word was made flesh
- And all flesh shall see the token, that God's word is never broken
- These promises are true:
- We are beloved children of God
- The darkness will not overcome the light
- And that's something worth remembering even when this short season is finally over