**Journey with us December 26 2021**

**Isaiah 52:7-10 and John 1:1-20**

Over these past two years most of us have become profoundly aware of *“the tyranny of distance”.*

The distance separating Australia from the rest of the world has worked to our advantage at various times during the pandemic. However the isolation of Australia from the rest of the world has prolonged separations within families, and as a nation we have aggressively restricted travel within and beyond our own states.

We have grieved over the lack of physical contact that we have been able to have with our relatives and close friends.

Nigel Smart has written, *“There is something essential to being human that’s related to physical presence and proximity. Touch, smell, and texture really matter.*

*Which is why it makes sense that the events of the first Christmas entailed the embodiment of a God who refuses to be distant but finds a way to engage humanity in the most earthy, physical, intimate way imaginable. The baby comes to us and, astonishingly, he is not merely a messenger from God, but God himself. It’s an enthralling story. A flicker of light and hope wrapped in human vulnerability, physicality, and a blanket.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

There is a rustic poverty about the story of the birth of Jesus. Yet in John’s account of the *‘Word being made flesh’* we see that even from this rustic setting the glory of God will be revealed.

“The incarnation means that human beings can see, hear and know God in ways never before possible.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

“In the incarnation we are given intimate, palpable, corporeal access to the cosmic reality of God.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

John states that *“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son,[*[*d*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-26049d)*] full of grace and truth.”[[4]](#footnote-4)*

The phrase “*lived amongst us*” is comes from the Jewish word *eskenosen*. It refers to God being *tabernacled* with us, encamped amongst us, God pitching a tent amongst us.[[5]](#footnote-5) The glory of God was encountered in the tabernacle, and so now the glory of God was encountered by the people in Jesus. God journeyed with Israel throughout their wanderings in the wilderness and God’s presence encouraged and sustained them. Now in Jesus they see God living and working amongst them as a community, they see God revealed in Jesus life and ministry.

In the message translation it is said in this way, *“The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.”[[6]](#footnote-6)*

John’s gospel points us beyond Bethlehem to the eternal reality of Jesus operative in this world since the dawn of time but revealed most fully to us in Jesus taking on flesh and living amongst us.

*During the week I was reading a story about a Minister who was keenly trying to put together his Sermon for Christmas Day, and struggling with this process. His church ran a facility for children with significant social and emotional needs. The Senior carer for a group of children appeared at his door, there was a problem with one of the children and she needed some support managing the situation. As it was Christmas time many of the children had returned to their homes, but this tended to make those who needed to stay even more unsettled.*

*An eight year old boy called Tommy had hidden under the bed wrapping himself up completely in a quilt and was refusing to move. The minister tried a wide variety of approaches to allure Tommy to engage with him but nothing was working. Eventually he got down on his hands and knees and was able to lift a corner of the quilt to reveal two big frightened eyes staring back at him. The minister knew this was going to take time. Tommy was a small boy and the Minister could have pulled him out from under the bed but what Tommy needed was to be able to get to a position of trusting these adults and feeling a sense of personal control of his life. So the minister climbed underneath the bed with Tommy and edged his way under the quilt. He talked of all the fun they would have the following day celebrating Christmas, but Tommy did not seem to be at all interested in what was being said. The Minister finally stopped talking and just lay there next to Tommy and eventually Tommy reached out to clasp his hand. The minister was able ever so slowly from then on to coax Tommy to gradually come out from under the bed.*

*As the Minister reflected on this experience he was reminded of how God has reached out to us. He said, “It was not until that first Christmas, until God stooped to earth itself, until he took our very place and came to dwell with us in our loneliness and alienation, that we like Tommy dared to stretch out our hands to take hold of love.”[[7]](#footnote-7)*

God came to camp with us, even under the bed!

In the midst of times of isolation and vulnerability, God camps with us. It is like Isaiah’s imagery of how delightful it is to see someone coming over the mountains to bring us good news, reassurance, God is with us.

We see this message in other parts of Scripture

*“My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people”.[[8]](#footnote-8) “See, the tent of God is among humans! He will make his home with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God.”[[9]](#footnote-9) “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”[*[*g*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23168g)*] (which means “God with us”).”[[10]](#footnote-10)*

God in Christ comes to us bringing good news, we are not forgotten, or abandoned, it may seem like the world is on its own pathway to destruction, but God is still with us.

At the core of the message of God to us are the concepts of grace and truth. *“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son,[*[*d*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-26049d)*] full of grace and truth.”[[11]](#footnote-11)*

Jesus embodies grace and truth. Jesus comes to us with grace and truth. Jesus offers us grace and truth. The two concepts are deeply entwined. God’s grace towards us is not based on naivete, God’s grace is fully informed by God’s truth, the truth about us, the truth about all people and all aspects of life, the truth that lies in the heart of God. This fullness of truth operates in our world alongside the fullness of God’s grace. It is a grace which is largely incomprehensible to us but is fully, experientially offered to us. As John states, *“From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”* [[12]](#footnote-12) An abundance of Grace, as the hymn writer expresses it “Plenteous grace with Thee is found, Grace to cover all my sin; Let the healing streams abound; Make and keep me pure within.”

Before we gather together next week we will have entered into a New Year. This is often a time of reflection on the past year, its challenges and joys, and it is often a time when we seek to explore how we wish to approach the New Year.

The grace and truth of God stand before us calling us to share this journey with God. To recognise that God’s gift of grace, the gift of God’s love towards us, is always available, always freely given to us in Jesus, always available in abundance grace upon grace. God offers a lifetime of new beginnings on a pathway which grows ever closer to God.

On the cusp of a new year, we remember that God in Christ “camps with us”, climbs under the bed with us. In our relationship with God we certainly can share life with Someone who does understand exactly how we are feeling, with someone who will travel with us, our constant source of hope.

1. Simon Smart, *Christmas Stories for the COVID age: Thinking out loud,* accessed through https://www.facebook.com/publicchristianity/photos/a.10150309424509773/10158737554264773/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Gail R. O’Day, “John: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck, *New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995) 524 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gail R. O’Day, “John: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck, *New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995) 524 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. John 1:14 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. J. Ramsey Michael, *John,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B, Eerdmans, 2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. John 1:14a The Message [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Henry Carter, “Take Hold of Love” in Max Lucado et al (Eds), *Christmas Stories for the Heart,* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 1997) 28-30 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ezekial 37:27 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Revelation 21:3 ISV [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Matthew 1:22-23 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. John 1:14 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. John 1:16 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-12)