

Let us pray...O Lord, open our hearts to hear Your Word and guide us in sharing this Good News! In Your name we ask, Amen. (Please be seated)

Good morning, and Welcome

And of course, a warm Merry Christmas, Fröhliche Weihnachten, Buon Natale, Feliz Navidad, Happy Christmas, Mele Kalikimaka, and in honor of Father Sam, Feliz Natal!

Isn't it wonderful...so many different words to wish the blessings of the season! All different languages but conveying the same message...to wish others a Christmas of blessing, hope, and love. Even as we define the word Merry – we could substitute Rejoice! So, Rejoice in Jesus Christ! Try it – Rejoice Christmas! - not just make merry but be merry – be the one rejoicing. Words convey so much for us in the language that we use...Words can paint pictures, insight hate or riots, offer comfort and hope and provide us a vehicle that in addition to actions, can describe the behaviors of making change or impacting our communities.

So, as we share these many blessings of the season, we experience different cultures, different people, different geographies and yet, we share the same message – a message that transcends our individuality. It's a message that means we share in the kingdom of God as we continue to celebrate and rejoice in the birth of God Incarnate – in Jesus.

Over the last two days we have been blessed to hear Father Sam share with us the incarnation of hope and that Jesus is the Word. As we enter into a study of today's Gospel, I find myself remembering how I encountered this passage.

In my younger years, I would hear or read this passage and would wonder what is the "**Word**"? Is there a secret **word** I was missing? I mean, if any one is familiar with the Movie "Grease" - the opening song, written by the Bee Gees includes the lyrics, "*Grease is the Word*"... So there it is again...So now the Word is Grease? It's just not making sense. Confusing right? After some more research, I read of how songwriter Barry Gibb was inspired to use *Grease is the Word* metaphorically representing the time, the place, the motion, the feeling of teenage angst,

rebellion and he felt using the visual depiction of the grease used in the hair of the boys in the 50's could make this resonate with the listeners. So, in this case, it really is a metaphor. But it does allow the listener a way to relate to the feelings of the youth at that time.

Now as I turn to the opening verses of what has been called , “The Christmas Gospel” ...in John’s Gospel message today, I find my desire to understand what is meant when reading:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”

Of course, now with the wisdom of my age, my studies lead me to look at this passage as it might be at the time of its writing. In Greek, the term “logos” means **Word**. The dictionary points to the words logic and logical as having their roots in logos. To the Greeks logos often meant much more than just Words. It conveyed knowledge, wisdom, reason, and revelation. A group of early philosophers in the third century before the common era, interpreted Logos *as the mind and purpose of God that permeated all of creation* and believed it could refer to the greatest power in the universe and the starting point for everything – our God. With Jesus as logos, Jesus is God in flesh.

In the first verse of John’s Gospel, he speaks of the beginning. John’s opening line of “In the Beginning” ... is a way to focus on the creation story... and we know that in Genesis Chapter 1 that God **spoke**, and creation happened: [for] God said, Let there be light! And so light appeared. God saw how good the light was... *“Now as one theologian reminds us, we hear in God’s speech—the Word—and it meant the heart, the character, the will, and the creative mind of God. John affirms that it was God’s logic, God’s Word, that set the universe in motion”*. A good perspective for us to think on.

As we think on it, what does this mean for us? As many theologians have stated God comes to now reveal himself. He is wrapped up in his desire for us to know him and thus he reveals himself to us through the divine human Jesus Christ! The

birth that we have been celebrating and rejoicing is all about God bringing himself as human to truly know the pain, the suffering, the joy, and the hope that is the human spirit. This, then, is God; God in Jesus who is able to touch, see, listen, and feel our very human nature. The **Word** becomes a living message that bridges the communication and understanding between the divine deity and our very humanness, our human selves.

Through our biblical teachings, we know that no one has seen God. Now, through Jesus, we see God because his **Word** has been made flesh. It's important for us to understand that Jesus is not coming as a prophet, but to us as God-in-the-flesh. This means that Jesus' teachings and behaviors are demonstrating what it is God wants us to know and live. From this understanding, we see the beauty and grace that is the light. And the light brings with it – hope. As followers of Jesus, as active participants in the Jesus Movement, we know that through Jesus we are God's children. We are the benefactors of grace and truth. As modern-day disciples of Christ, we too, are the light of the world.

Again, many theologians can help us to understand what is the Truth: the truth is that God became a man and what a comforting truth that can be for us. It means that the heart of the Christian experience is not human effort, but divine grace. He has a first-hand experience of poverty, rejection, betrayal, human treachery and hypocrisy, loneliness, grief, exhaustion, and suffering. Now we are participants in knowing what God wants for us. A God who is not only beyond us, but who also chose to be with us—a divine Messiah who comes into the very messiness of our human condition.

And we do know and understand this divinity because we have called Jesus – “Emmanuel” - which translates into “God with us”. So, we **do** understand that we are given grace and truth through our faith. And our faith becomes that light. Light that vanquishes the darkness, and we know that we too can be that light. Our belief in Jesus as the Savior links us directly to God. We know that the law was given through Moses, but it is this new birth, that the grace and truth and God's love has come to us...it is the birth of Jesus. We no longer have a fear of God, but through Jesus, we see that God is love.

Christmas is not just about a babe in a manger. If we truly ponder it on our hearts, it is not a once-a-year focus. Christmas is about the heavenly hope and the Jesus in the flesh who lives with us, dies for us, and is resurrected for us. Christmas is really about the fulfillment of the prophecies and ultimately that it's helping us to see and know God's kingdom coming down to live in our humanity here on earth. With this faith, God's love thrives and abounds and will never leave us!

So, while some of us may be taking down the more material things we recognize as Christmas, that is... the tree, the decorations, the cards, the lights, yet through our faith tradition, we now know that Christmas continues to embrace us throughout the year. For it is the unseen but ever present and felt grace, love, hope, and peace that is with us. It is the salvation we have through Jesus' sacrifice of love for us. We have it within us to live into the life that Jesus role models for us. We don't have to take on the world, but we can take a single action that can become a ripple in our communities. We can make one small difference in the life of someone experiencing homelessness, living in poverty, facing seemingly insurmountable immigration issues, or even dealing with mental or other health challenges. Through our actions, our listening, our studies, and our prayers, we can be the human hands and feet of our Savior who came to us in humility and love.

Knowing that this blessing is felt around the world, sharing our Merry Christmas - and remembering that we are rejoicing - allows us to live into the positivity that is the hope and love of God's kingdom on earth. By hearing the various greetings, in many languages, many geographies, from every race, gender, and age - it is proof that we are ALL God's children, we are ALL siblings that share the love of God through the incarnation of Jesus. It is us together - our voices, our actions, our love, and our prayers that is the spirit of Christmas...keeping Christmas alive throughout the months to come. It doesn't take a tree; it doesn't take lights, decorations, or gifting, it takes our very humanity even within this volatile and chaotic world we may find ourselves. For the Gift that God has given us is all we need to realize that we are loved... that we have hope...and that we are never alone, for we have our faith in the Word - the Logos - made flesh!

Amen.