

John 1:1-5, 10-18
Covenant Presbyterian Church

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Madison, WI

Christmas at John's House
By Jeff Fox-Kline

This Advent season we are studying the Christmas stories in each of the gospels. We started with Christmas at Mark's house, and pastor Charlie talked about John the Baptist's call towards repentance. Christmas at Mark's house was about preparing for Christmas by clearing out the junk. Last week Clara talked about Christmas at Matthew's house, and how Matthew leaves a big table for all sorts of member of our families, even (especially?) those we maybe wouldn't want to sit next to. John's Christmas is a little different. John's Christmas doesn't start on Christmas, but before time ever began. This is one of my favorite writings in the whole New Testament – mysterious and poetic. I love the musicality of it, and the imagery it commands. Christmas at John's house is not a story, but a song. Listen to the first Christmas carol, Christmas at John's house.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, ^[a] and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, ^[c] and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ 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] full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son,^[e] who is close to the Father's heart,^[f] who has made him known.

Christmas at John's house

It's December 14th. You are driving alone along a country road, leaving a Christmas party hosted by a distant relative out in the sticks. It's December, and a cold one at that, and despite your car's heat being turned on, your feet are still cold. It's late. Not so late that you'd be too tired to come to church the next day, but late enough that the darkness has been your driving companion for some time. You haven't encountered any signs of civilization for miles. You have your brights on, because there's no way you'll blind any passing motorists, they haven't been seen for at least an hour. Occasionally you'll pass by a driveway that disappears into the darkness. Who lives there? What kind of life do they lead? How long is that driveway anyway? Those are the fleeting thoughts that pass through your mind as you continue down the road; the pavement rumbling beneath your tires as the minutes pass. Then you see something down the way. A small, constant light. Something almost like the filament in an old fashioned light bulb, suspended in the air just above the horizon. Curious, you stop the car and look at it for a while. It doesn't move. It doesn't dim or brighten. It is just a dot out in the distance. You get back on the road. As you drive the light gets bigger. It starts to take shape. The shape becomes recognizable as a house, a big one too. Eventually you decide to turn off your brights. No need, the light

actually starts to illumine the road all on its own. You get even closer. The house sits atop of a bald hill. An old Victorian. Stately, but not gaudy. It is arrayed with the largest Christmas light show you have ever seen on a house. White lights, not the colored lights that decorate so many suburban homes. None of the projected candy canes and snowflakes that dance across attached garages that have become so popular in the recent past. Small white lights, everywhere you can see. For some reason, this over-the-top display doesn't seem tacky or overdone. It looks natural, like when the house was built the architect also designed a lighting display that wouldn't be possible for at least another century. It's inspiring. You stop at the bottom of the hill and look up. You see the lights, like the entire house is an impossibility, an alien construction somehow placed in a location where you're surprised electricity even exists. But then you see into the windows. You see, somehow past the incandescence of the Christmas display, you see the warm glow of a fire. You see candles lit, and you realize that inside that incredible show of light is a man. You know this man. You can't remember how, probably knew him growing up, maybe a teacher, or one of your grandparent's friends from church, but for some reason he looks exactly as he looked back then. It's nice to see him doing well. He looks rather cozy. After a minute of admiring the house, the luminous display holding a reassuring glow inside, you get back on the road. But it doesn't seem so dark anymore. The entire rest of the way home, you think with wonder at the sheer scope of the light, and in your heart you feel the warmth and reassurance of the radiant firelight. Christmas at John's house: the brilliant light of creation, the comfort of that light made flesh. The darkness shall never overcome.