

Scripture: John 1:1-5

Message: Life in All Its Fullness

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New Year's Day

Pastor Jack Van de Hoef

“In the beginning.” Familiar words that we find on the first page of our Bibles, in Genesis 1:1. In the beginning, God created.

“Let’s start at the very beginning; it’s a very good place to start.” Those words may bring to mind the lyrics from “Do-Re-Mi” from The Sound of Music.

Today we come to worship at the beginning of a new year. In some ways, today is not much different than yesterday, just another day on the calendar. And yet there is something meaningful about acknowledging our trust in God ‘in the beginning.’

The gospel of John reminds us of this trust with his opening words of his gospel: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God....Through him all things were made.”

This is John’s version of the Christmas story. It’s nothing like the traditional stories from Matthew and Luke. There is no account of Mary and Joseph, no trip to Bethlehem, no angels or shepherds or magi. We know where to find all those details. But John is talking about a new beginning in the history of the world. Something new is happening. Someone new has come into the world and things will never be the same.

“In the beginning was the Word.”

Jesus is the Word to whom John is referring. John clearly identifies Jesus as God and also makes it clear that Jesus always has been. In fact, Jesus was very involved in the very beginning, the origins of this world, in making all things.

“In him was life.” The word for life in the Greek is “zoë.” It is a word that is repeated in the gospel of John some 47 times. In these verses about origins and beginnings, Jesus is identified as a source of life.

It’s obvious that this life is more than simply the physical life of eating and breathing. This life was the light of people. This life shone as light in the darkness.

What kind of darkness?

Perhaps it was the darkness experienced by the shepherds that are part of the Christmas story. Amidst the life of caring for sheep, they would experience a fellow shepherd being mauled by a surprise attack by a bear. They would have to bandage up his slashed

arms and face, or perhaps bring his broken and dead body to his grieving family.

They would see the sheep which they cared for ending up at the temple to be slaughtered for sacrifices. They would see sheep with broken legs from a fall or from stepping in a hole. Such sheep would be useless for the sacrifice. They would see sheep whose wool was covered in blood after an attack by a wild animal.

Is that the darkness that we see, the darkness of brokenness and death? A young father is killed by a drunk driver. His wife and children grieve over his broken, lifeless body. A 35-year old is ravaged by cancer until his body can't fight anymore. His family grieves over such an untimely death. We see the broken bodies of women and men who are mutilated by their addiction to drugs or alcohol. Or the bodies of young girls are broken by being sold to men in the sex trade.

We see the wild beasts in men who desire only to satisfy their selfish lust by buying the service of these women or paying others to produce pornographic material. Like wild animals, it is never enough and the blood of victims is on their hands.

In him was life. We come to the beginning of a new year, with all of its potential. We are reminded that in Jesus was life and that life was the light of all people.

In him was the life to end the need for animal sacrifices to cover for sin.

In him was life to defeat the power of death. No, not to stop death from happening yet, but to give comfort and hope to a grieving family that death is not the final word.

In him was life, to defeat the selfish lust of sin that destroys the lives of others. In him was life to overcome the tempting power of sin. In him was life and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness.

Perhaps it was the darkness of shame that Mary had experienced during her pregnancy. It was not that *Mary* felt so ashamed—she knew the reason for her pregnancy outside of marriage. But her neighbours didn't understand. They would remind her of her indiscretion when they saw she was pregnant outside of a marriage commitment.

With Joseph, they would feel the embarrassment, the stares and whispers as they walked down the street, the sudden silence when they came near a group of friends. They knew the darkness of pain of rejection by those who had been friends since childhood, but no longer would associate with such an unrighteous person. They knew the pain of being misunderstood.

It's a darkness that continues to be experienced by single parents who are made to feel shame and embarrassment. It's the pain of rejection when they are told, or made to feel that they are a failure and a loser.

It's a darkness experienced by the LGBTQ person who is afraid to ask questions, afraid to speak of their struggles, because of the stigma of admitting that they are confused about their sexuality. It's the darkness of being misunderstood and being labelled to be just like all the rest and being pushed out to join "*them*."

It's a darkness of having to hide the truth about the abortion and the pain and regret that has developed since then. But no one wants to listen or people refuse to talk to you when you say what you've done.

It's the darkness of the stigma of depression and mental illness. It's the dread of admitting the need for help for fear of being rejected and shunned by those whom you need around you.

In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness.

This is not just a message of 'feel good because it's a new year, a clean slate, a new start.' This is not a superstitious wish of people deluded by the claims of religion, who make up stories to deal with tough reality.

In him was life. He was there at creation and brought life into this world. He brought light into the darkness and chaos. Left to ourselves, we will only continue to kill and destroy and embarrass and take advantage and inflict further suffering.

But Jesus came to defeat that power of sin, once and for all. We came to bring a new beginning. He came to bring hope to those who see no place to turn. He came to show love to enemies, and even to die for them.

He came to defeat the power of sin that causes hurt and brokenness, so we may know and express forgiveness and love. He came to give us a new life to live, a life of love, of compassion, of understanding.

To know this life and this light, we must receive him. We must believe in Jesus because he *is* the life. Life can be found in no one else, not in anything else. To believe in Jesus means we must accept him for who he is. He is the divine Son of God, Christ, the Lord. He is the son of Mary, sleeping in a manger. He is the Saviour Jesus hanging to die on the cross. He is the resurrected and ascended Lord, exalted and sitting at the right hand of the

Father. He is the King who is coming again. He is our Saviour from sin.

In him was life, and that life came into the world. We do not have to be overwhelmed by the stories we hear in the news. We do not have to be afraid of what this new year might bring. We do not have to worry about the uncertainties of another year. We may face this year with the confidence of a relationship of life with our Lord in heaven. Life in all its fullness.

It started long ago, when the Word, who was life, was part of bringing this creation into being. This Word brought life into our lives when he came to this world. That life brings light in the darkness, a light of hope, a light of joy as we live with our Lord.

Believe in Jesus and find true life in him. Live life in all its fullness.

Amen.

### Prayer

Lord of time and new beginnings,  
as our steps take us into an unknown future,  
give us confidence in your faithfulness.  
Help us see opportunities to serve and to love.  
Give us good judgment to know what new things to do for you this year.  
Grant us the inner strength to finish each job we begin.  
May we fully know the joy of doing your will.  
May your kingdom come on earth—  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.