

## **“The One Who Is” series**

### **Sermon 3: “Forever” (John 1.1-14)**

**December 16, 2018**

Here are a couple I thought were pretty funny.

- Here’s Mary to the wise men: “No diapers?!” “The first and last male sponsored baby shower.” If Peyton Manning was there, he’d give Jesus an insurance policy.
- Here’s another, Joseph to the wise men: “He wants to know if you brought him an X-Box.”
- This one is pretty good, no words: The pig, and the chicken, and the donkey are all giving the cow the evil eye as he eats Jesus’ bed.
- For you ex-Catholics: “Hail, Mary.”
- Then there’s Mary on her donkey, next to a couple friends. “Well if it isn’t Joseph and Mary!” Do you read the bumper stickers? “Our son is an honor student.” “Our son is in med school.” Mary’s: “Our son is God.”

These two I like, but maybe because I am kind of weird. And they actually kind of tie into my sermon this morning. Any of you old guys remember Calvin and Hobbes. It’s an old comic strip – pretty funny, and pretty smart.

- Calvin is looking up at the night sky, explaining things to Hobbes. “That cloud of stars is our galaxy, the Milky Way. ... We hurl through an incomprehensible darkness. In cosmic terms, we are subatomic particles in a grain of sand on an infinite beach.” And then he is quiet. Then he says, “I wonder what’s on TV now.”

Here’s the deal: There are things that blow our minds. But often we don’t ponder them much. There are things that kind of put everything else into perspective. ... God is like that. ... Jesus is like that. ... What I am going to read to you about God, and Jesus is like that. If you really try to “get it,” it will blow up your mind. Because who God is and what he has done – well ... words aren’t enough. Here it is, from the Gospel of John, chapter 1, verses 1-14. Really try to get it. Here goes. (Why don’t you all stand as I read it to you.)

“In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The

Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. ... The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. So the Word (the Word, who was with God, and who was God) became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son."

(Go ahead and be seated) So, "In the beginning," in our beginning, "the Word already existed" – it wasn't his beginning! ... And this "Word" was both "with God," and at the same time he "was God." How does that work? And somehow this "Word is (actually) the Creator," even though God is the Creator too. And this Word somehow gives life to everything that lives, and "light" too. What's that mean? And then the Creator somehow became a human. Then God becomes a man. The infinitely powerful, infinitely smart, infinitely big eternal one gave himself fingers and toes, and teeth and a nose, and eyes, and ears, and a belly button. And if that's true, it is really no wonder the world didn't recognize him; and it's really no wonder they rejected him. And yet, for those who were willing to let God be God ... his way he makes it possible for them to be "children of God." ... It's not illogical, it just blows the mind!

We are in week 3 of a 4 week series leading up to Christmas. We are looking at 4 birth stories of Jesus: one in Matthew, one in Luke (that was last week), one in John (that's today), and one in Revelation (next week). And this ... "birth story" in John is way different than the ones in Matthew and Luke. Those Gospels talk about Joseph and Mary, and the shepherds and the wise men, and the angels and the manger and all that. They tell us Jesus is special – he's the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior. But John is different. He's not building a case for believing in Jesus, he just tells you who he really is. This is ... God! This is the Creator stepping into creation. This is the One who gives you life. Without him you don't exist. If John is wrong, Jesus is the biggest fraud in history! If he is right, it would be insane to blow Jesus off! There is no middle path!

He opens up like this: “In the beginning.” No Jew would have missed it. What other book starts with those words? “In the beginning” \_\_\_\_ Yeah, Genesis. Those are the first words in the Bible: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Well John says, In the beginning, before any of these galaxies spun into existence, in the beginning the Word already ... And somehow this Word is both with God, and he was God – however that works.

And in the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth (you know, the Genesis stuff), well ... that was this guy. Do you know how God would speak a word, and it would happen. God says, “Let there be light, and there was light.” God says, “Let there be seas and dry land, and there were seas and dry land. And God says, “Let there be grass, and trees, and fish, and birds, and ... people.” Well, John says, when God said a Word ... that Word was Jesus. That was Jesus doing all that stuff.

Then John says, “In him was life” ... He’s not saying that Jesus was alive, he’s saying that Jesus was life, he is life. And his life kind of lit up everything else that receives life. He is what makes everything else live ... somehow.

Then John says, “His light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never ... we really don’t know what it says next, because in the Greek, the next word can mean different things.

- If you are reading the New American Standard Bible, it says: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never understand it.” He blows the mind.
- If you are reading the New Living Translation, it says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.” He always wins.

They both work! And then ... then John gets to his Christmas story ... kinda sorta. At least this is what Christmas is really all about. John says, “This Word came into the very world he created, but the world didn’t recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.” ... So God ... God the Word ... our Creator, our life, our light ... becomes a baby... God becomes a baby. Kind of the ultimate divine incognito. Divinity hidden by a human mask. So ... this baby, lying in a manger, he’s

the one who got this all started. And then he traded heaven for a feeding trough. Meanwhile, life goes on, the village keeps on. The neighbors oblivious to the idea that God had just moved in next door. The master and mistress of the house, or inn, or whatever ... ignorant of the fact that they had sent their God to be born in the barn.

It blows the mind, doesn't it? It staggers the imagination! It's the wildest and craziest story ever! In fact, for so many, it is simply too weird, too wild, too crazy to be believed. That a God ... the God ... a God this big, a God big enough to play with galaxies like marbles – so to speak – could or would shrink this small. ... .. And yet ... ..

Most people I suspect – many Jesus followers, and most of those who are not – most people don't think it too weird, too wild, too crazy to believe that something this small could morph into something this big. They call it the "Big Bang," and it is probably the most commonly accepted theory as to how our universe grew up. Listen, you don't have to buy this, guys; that's not the point. Some Jesus followers think this is the way God did it. Other Jesus followers think it's crazy. That's not the point ... this morning. I'm just saying that a whole lot of people think it's absurd that a big God could morph into something that little, while they don't blink at the idea that something this small could morph into something that big.

It's hard for guys like me to really understand the theory. I'm not a scientist. So it's kind of crazy for me to try to explain it. But it goes something like this. Somewhere around 13.7 ... billion years ago, all the planets, and all the stars, and all the galaxies, and everything in them – everything we are made of – it was all condensed down to an incredibly small, nearly infinitely dense, unimaginably hot little point only a few millimeters wide. Everything physical that is would fit on the tip of a baby's finger. Is that wild? Kind of like a supercharged black hole on steroids.

And then for some reason – those who don't believe in God don't know how and they don't know why – for some reason it exploded ... kind of the mother of all explosions. In a hundredth of a billionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of a second – I think that's about 35 zeroes – this little speck of everything doubles in size about 90 times, and in an instant matter, and energy, and space, and time are all born.

At first all there is is energy, kind of like radiation on steroids. And the forces of nature start to crystallize: gravity, and the strong and weak nuclear forces, and electromagnetism ... all in the first second of time. And then these tiny, tiny little subatomic particles spring into existence: electrons, and quarks, and stuff like that. And as it all keeps expanding and cooling, protons and neutrons form. All that happens, they tell us, in the very first second of creation.

In the next minute or two, as it is all growing and cooling, these particles begin to bind and they form the first element: helium. And it all keeps growing. About 50,000 years later, as I understand it, these electrons and protons start binding together to form the second element: hydrogen. And it keeps growing. And all this hydrogen and all this helium morphs into this incredible big, and exponentially growing cosmic cloud. They call that the Atomic Era.

About 200 million years later, they tell us, galaxies start to form inside this cosmic cloud. And then, about 3 billion years in, the stars begin to form. And the heat in the stars began to convert the hydrogen and the helium into all the other elements on our periodic table. And these elements, they tell us, become the building blocks for the planets, and the moons, and everything on them ... everything we see today, including all of us.

(Hubble deep space pic) And it just keeps growing. Until today, they estimate about 2 trillion galaxies in the known universe. (That's a 2 with 12 zeroes. That's a lot.) And they estimate an average of about 100 billion stars per galaxy. (That's a 100 with 9 more zeroes. That's a lot.) So our little sun is 1 of a billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy, which is 1 in about 2 trillion galaxies ... in the known universe.

We know that light travels at about 186,000 miles per second. It's fast! They tell us that it would take light 93 billion years (93 billion years times 186,000 miles a second) to cross the known universe. And it's still growing, they tell us. It's getting bigger. The Big Bang.

Guys, I don't care if you buy all this. Some Jesus followers do, others don't. The only thing we Jesus followers agree on is that God did it. You see, they can't tell us where that infinitely dense, infinitely hot ... thing ... came from 13.7 billion years ago, or whenever this thing was born. All I

know for sure is that something ... or someone ... had to get it all started. And John says ... that was the Word, that was God, that was Jesus, that was the one who was born 2000 years ago to a peasant teenager named Mary, who then wrapped him with strips of cloth and laid him in a feeding trough.

And it's just ... ironic to me. How is it that those who reject the idea of a God can accept the idea that everything that exists just popped into existence on it's own, as a little tiny dot of infinitely dense, infinitely hot ... stuff, and then grew and expanded into all that is ... on its own. But then they turn around and blow off as fantastical the idea that the one who spoke all this into existence – it had to come from somewhere! That the one who spoke all this into existence could, and would shrink down to the size of a fertilized egg, where he would take 9 months to grow into ... Jesus. You can buy this: something mindless and purposeless grows from this to that out of nothing; but you can't buy that the one who is infinitely smart, infinitely powerful, and infinitely creative could shrink down to this ... because he wanted to?!

So here's what John tells us, in his birth story, of Jesus. He tells us that the Creator himself, the Word of God, God himself shrunk to the size of a fertilized egg, about a tenth of a millimeter wide, .004 inches in diameter, one of the largest cells in the human body, but just barely big enough to be seen without the aid of a microscope. And then by the time God implanted himself in the wall of Mary's uterus, he had divided into 12-16 ... cells.

And over his first 4 weeks sharing the stuff of creation, as a fetus, God developed a spinal cord, and a nervous system, and a gastrointestinal system. He grew a set of lungs, and a human heart. Fully God ... fetus God.

Over the next 4 weeks, sharing the stuff of creation, God began to grow a face, and his arms and his legs began to move, and his heart – his tiny little human heart – started beating, and his brain and other organs began to form. So, the omniscient, omnipotent God gave himself a tiny, tiny little brain.

By 12 weeks our God, our infinitely big, omnipresent God, our fetus God was about 3 inches long, and weighed about 1 oz. He had fingerprints –

he could unlock his iPhone. He could smile, and frown, and suck, and swallow, and urinate. And for the first time you could see that our God had chosen to do life here on earth as a boy.

By 16 weeks he could kick, and he could hear – God gave himself ears! He had a strong little grip. A God with fingernails, and toenails, a Creator God who would roll over in his amniotic fluid. By 20 weeks his doctor could listen to his heartbeat with a stethoscope – if his doctor had had one. By 20 weeks God has hair, and eyelashes, and eyebrows. He can suck his thumb, and even get hiccups.

By 24 weeks our transcendent God, the one who spoke it all into existence, was 11-14 inches long, and he weighed about 1½ lbs. His eyes are open – though there is not a lot to see. And he starts collecting the material for his first bowel movement.

By 28 weeks he begins the movements necessary for breathing, and he starts adding body fat. By 32 weeks he responds to sound, and passes between periods of sleep and wakefulness.

By 36-38 weeks our God is about 19 or 20 inches long, he weighs somewhere around 6 lbs. And then Mary's contractions start, at first 15 or 20 minutes apart, stretching her cervix. Then they speed up to somewhere between 2 and 5 minutes apart so God can move into her birth canal. Her contractions keep coming, nearly every minutes, lasting nearly a minute ... until finally our Creator – our God -- is born, and Mary wraps him in strips of cloth, and lays him in a feeding trough.

John says, "He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him." ... No kidding! John says, "He came to his own people, and even they rejected him." Well no kidding! Even with all their prophecies and all their waiting, who could have seen this coming? "But (John says) to all who believed him and accepted him (and we will see why they did over the next 4 months), he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn (we are reborn) — not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but (with) a birth that comes from God."

“So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son.” He was ... Immanuel: God with us. God took a body, a birthdate, and a temporary address. So we could gaze on his glory ... his unfailing love, and his unfaithfulness. We saw his glory in his words, in his heart, in the miraculous signs he performed. But most of all we saw his glory when the Word of God stood before us and showed us where the nails had pierced his hands and his feet, and where the spear had pierced his side.

Guys, words aren’t enough. Anything we say about him actually diminishes him. Maybe poetry speaks more plainly. I’m not fond of poetry, but how else can a man describe the ineffable, the unfathomable?

Here’s John Donne. He says,

Immensitie cloysterd in thy deare wombe,  
Now leaves his welbelov’d imprisonment,  
There he hath made himselfe to his intent  
Weak enough, now into our world to come ...  
Seest thou, my Soule, with thy faiths eyes, how he  
Which fills all place, yet none holds him, doth lye?

Here’s John Milton – you know, Paradise Lost – He says,

That glorious Form, that Light unsufferable,  
And that far-beaming blaze of Majesty,  
Wherewith he (was accustomed) wont at Heav’ns high Council-  
Table,  
To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,  
He laid aside; and here with us to be,  
Forsook the Courts of everlasting Day,  
And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.

One More. George Herbert. He says,

The God of power, as he did ride  
In his majestick robes of glorie  
Resolv’d to light; and so one day

He did descend, undressing all the way.

Guys, the absurdity of this story is almost incomprehensible. One bigger than the universe itself passes through the birth canal of a frightened teenager. One whose days are numberless draws his first breath. One who could rattle the heavens with his finger flails his arms as a young girl rocks him. One who spoke the universe into existence with a word babbles and coos. Unimaginably the Maker of all things shrank down, down, down, so small as to become an ovum, a single fertilized egg barely visible to the naked eye, an egg that would divide and redivide until a fetus took shape, enlarging cell by cell inside a nervous teenager. God with a human face. God with diapers. The Son of God, the turning point in history, the touchstone of your life, laying in a feeding trough.

There are two moments, I think, when God was at his most deceptive. The first moment was this one – that first Christmas, when God became a baby. God's aren't born! The second moment was 30 or so years later, when Jesus' body hung limp on a cross. God's don't die! But the real God can ... and did. But the real God can, and did. Because he wanted us to know that he understands. And he wanted us to know how much he loves us. And he wanted us to know that he can fix whatever is broken. Guys, the only thing crazier than the story of Jesus is our unwillingness to bend our knees to him.

It's a wild story! Bottom line: you either buy it or deny it.

- If you deny it, you explain how all this got started! You explain how all that is just popped into existence on its own, out of nothing. And then live with the emptiness that follows.
- Or you buy it. There is a God behind all this. All this is on purpose. And we matter. And to prove it, our Creator God ... as the apostle Paul said, "Emptied himself." That's what Christmas is all about.

And you buy it by accepting Jesus as your Savior, and your Lord ... which is who he is. So, What are you going to do this year to show yourself, and those who watch you, that he is the reason for the season, and that his gifts are the greatest of all?