

## Meadowbrook Congregational Church

“Where to From Here?”

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### **John 1:1-14**

*1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

*6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.*

*10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who 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, full of grace and truth.*

When I was growing up, my family was the master of the short vacation. My father didn't want to be away from home any longer than he had to be. We would plan a vacation to a beautiful Lake Michigan beach. Upon our arrival we would get out of the car, wade in the water, stroll on the sand, buy a souvenir, get back in the car, and go home. We would visit the Mackinaw Bridge. After driving over the bridge we would stop in St. Ignace for a family photo and to chase a few seagulls. Then we would drive back over the bridge, buy some fudge, and then head back home. I recall one time when we actually talked my dad into stopping at Sea Shell City. That was a really exciting vacation!

Long ago, back when Laura was pregnant with Maren, along with her mother we visited Washington D.C. I was looking forward to seeing the important and historic landmarks of our nation's capital. Laura on the other hand was fighting a horrible case of morning sickness and simply wanted to keep from throwing up. So, while Laura and her mother sat on a bench talking, I went on a whirlwind tour of Washington D.C. In just a couple of hours I saw the Vietnam War Memorial, the Washington Monument, the Capitol Building, the Lincoln Memorial, the Treasury Building, the Supreme Court

building and a couple of museums. Please note that I said, "I saw" these things. I didn't actually go into the buildings. I was in a hurry and couldn't be bothered taking the time to get too involved. On that day, having arrived at the destination was quite enough. I was content just to be there.

On Christmas Eve we read the familiar words of the gospel of Luke detailing the arrival of Mary and Joseph into the tiny village of Bethlehem. They lived in Nazareth but traveled to the city of David where their son Jesus was born. We heard about shepherds, whose everyday task of watching their sheep was interrupted by the song of angels. These shepherds made their way to Bethlehem to see for themselves the good news of which the angels sang. The gospel of Matthew told of wise men from the east that journeyed a distance, following a star to pay homage to the newborn King.

Mary. Joseph, Shepherds, Wise men. All were travelers that first Christmas. All traveled to experience something or to see something. The gospel stories are very clear about the importance of each journey to Bethlehem and to the manger. But as I reflect upon the familiar story again, I wonder what happened immediately after the journey to the stable. Was this nativity scene just a short interlude in their otherwise ordinary world? After the first Christmas, did these men and women simply get back on their donkey and camels and return home to a life unchanged?

Actually, the story of Scripture is quite clear that these Christmas participants all had more traveling yet to do. Matthew tells of Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus leaving for Egypt to escape the bloodshed brought by the jealousy of King Herod. Thus Jesus followed the footsteps of the people of Israel and in turn fulfilled prophecy. Such an adventure must have taught Mary and Joseph that this child would continue to bring to them both meaning and mystery. Luke writes of the serious impact of that first night upon the parents saying about Mary, "she treasured these things and pondered them in her heart."

Luke writes of shepherds returning home after visiting the baby Jesus. They returned "glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard." They went back to work, perhaps not expecting their responsibilities to be much different. But they knew that the joy of that newborn child lived on in what they did each day. God had somehow entered their ordinary world. They had to find a way to glorify and praise God in their everyday actions.

Matthew tells of the wise men who after the visit to Bethlehem returned home by another way. They were told in a dream of the deceit of Herod and went home with a new attitude, one skeptical of earthly powers and authority and hopeful of the promise of God's way found in the newborn king. In his commentary on Matthew author Stanley Hauerwas writes, "God did not mean for them to stay in Israel...Rather they are charged to return home, becoming an outpost, a witness to the joy they have experienced."

I wonder, having visited the manger of Christ's birth ourselves, having celebrated the love of God come down to us, will we leave Christmas feeling any different? Or will we simply consider it a short respite from the reality of life, and now that it is over, simply put Christmas away. We will return to home unmoved and unchanged.

It strikes me that all of the Christmas notables returned home, but to a world that would not be the same. The joy, the mystery, the challenge, the promise-the very presence of God had arrived upon their turf. God had joined them in their existence and

they had seen God for themselves. Their world was good enough for God. And if they were good enough to be part of God's story.

We have come to Christmas. It may now be time to go home. But where do we go from here? Once you've been in the presence of the Christ Child, your world is not the same. In this season we have found joy in helping others. In this season we have learned that love is more important than material gifts. In this season we have learned that the love found in and shared with others can overcome the darkness of grief and regret. In this season we have learned the need to seek God's presence in a world that promotes distance from the mystery of the divine. In this season we have dreamed and hoped for peace-in our world, in our relationships, and in our hearts. Now is the time to bear witness to what we have experienced. We will leave Bethlehem, but we will leave with a promise.