

**Dec. 28, 2025**

**Be Amazed: God among Us**

Jn. 1:19-34; Ps. 32:1-2; Isa. 40:3

**1. Introduction**

During this Advent and Christmas season we've been using the Leader magazine Worship Resources and the theme we've centered ourselves on has been "Be Amazed". We've examined some amazing, albeit strange for Advent, stories and passages from Scripture that ultimately lead us toward amazement at our God who shows up in our world and lives, what we remember and celebrate at Christmas.

Last week the sermon was entitled Love Comes Down. We looked at John 1:1-18 and reflected on the reality that at Christmas we celebrate Jesus as Love Made Flesh coming down to dwell among us.

Today, we pick up where we left off in John 1 looking at the passage we just read from verses 19-34 and our sermon is entitled Be Amazed: God Among Us. We'll spend some time reflecting on this reality of God dwelling among us in Jesus the Christ and our role as witnesses.

The Book of John is unique among the Gospel books and we see that uniqueness right off the bat. While Matthew and Luke begin their accounts with the birth of Jesus and Mark begins with John the Baptist and Jesus being baptized by him, John begins by giving a more 'cosmic' account of Jesus the Christ, placing Them as the Word that was there with God, as God, in the beginning of all things.

John's account wants to make sure we have an understanding not just of who Jesus the person is, but who the Christ is. I find Richard Rohr valuable in helping us understand this distinction. He wrote a book called The Universal Christ and in it he strives to communicate to us that "Christ is not Jesus' last name" (p. 11). By this he means that it is important for us to have a clear understanding of both terms in the title 'Jesus Christ.' Rohr says later, "Christ is God, and Jesus is the Christ's historical manifestation in time." (p. 19).

John's gospel account begins by giving us a grand, cosmic understanding of the Word, the Christ, as Creator, as God, before drawing our attention down to the earth, to Jesus, as the Word become flesh, God in the flesh, who chose to dwell among us. A slightly different starting point to help us understand the enormity of what was taking place.

**2. John the Baptist as Witness**

That's the passage we read last week and then John jumps ahead in our passage today. Jesus is now an adult and ready to begin their public, earthly ministry as God Among Us. And we see John the Baptist is sent to prepare people for this Jesus and their ministry. Last week we read that John the Baptist was "**a man sent from God....He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.**" (Jn. 1:6-8).

John was a witness to Jesus the Christ. And in our passage today we saw that John was clear on his role. He had been doing what he was called to do, preach and baptize and prepare people for an encounter with the Divine. And in so doing, he began to gain a following, so a delegation is sent to inquire about who he is.

And John does not try to capitalize on his growing popularity and claim to be more than he is. When asked he states clearly that he is not the Christ. Not Elijah. Not the Prophet. He's a witness. Here to help prepare people for the Christ's coming in Jesus. Here to prepare people for an encounter with the Divine.

### **3. Us as Witnesses**

And this is the idea that I want to communicate this morning: Like John the Baptist, we are witnesses to the Christ, preparing people and giving opportunity for an encounter with the Divine.

Later in the book of John (17), Jesus prays for everyone who comes to believe through the disciples. He prays that we would be one just as Jesus and the Father are One and that we would know our inclusion in God so that the world could know who Jesus the Christ is and know God's love (John 17:20-23). The world comes to know who God is, who Jesus the Christ is, through the people that follow Them.

In Acts 1 the disciples are told by the risen Jesus that they "will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on [them], and [they] will be [Jesus'] witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8). Like John the Baptist, they are called to be witnesses.

Likewise, the church in Corinth is reminded that followers of the Christ are "Christ's ambassadors" (2 Cor. 5:20). Though these words are written to specific people in a specific time it is fair to extend this to ourselves, followers of the Christ in our time and context. We are ambassadors of the Christ, witnesses. Like John the Baptist, we are able to help prepare people to encounter the Divine.

One of my favorite songs that we sing here often from our Voices Together is 'Christ Has No Body Here but Ours.' (#568). We sing:

Christ has no body here but ours; no hands, no feet here on earth but ours.

Ours are the eyes through which he looks on this world with kindness....

Ours are the hands through which he works, ours are the feet on which he moves,

Ours are the voices through which he speaks to this world with kindness.

Through our touch, our smile, our listening ear,

Embodied in us, Jesus is living here.

So let us go now, filled with the Spirit, into this world with kindness

As I mentioned last week, this is an emphasis within the Anabaptist movement. Historically we have this understanding that our faith is not just a set of beliefs or doctrines to mentally adhere to, but means walking with Jesus in the here and now, striving to live as They did. Striving to look on the world with their eyes, to speak with their kindness and love, to embody the Christ in our homes and communities and world.

#### **4. Jesus Among Us**

So how did Jesus come as God Among Us? What was the posture, the spirit, they came in and lived among us in? I want to reflect on this a bit, focusing our attention on some of what we see in the Gospel of John.

- **John 4. Samaritan Woman. Embracing Outsiders.**
  - o While traveling from Judea to Galilee, Jesus and his disciples travel through Samaria. There was animosity between the Jewish people and the Samaritans. So here was a prominent Jewish man, Jesus, among a people that were considered outsiders by others. Yet Jesus sits down at a well and engages in long conversation with a Samaritan woman. And then he ends up staying for a couple days among this group of people so often ostracized, ministering to them. God Among Us went to the ostracized, the outsiders, and embraces them, ministers to them, loves them.
- **John 5:1-18. Jesus heals. Prioritizes the person, not customs.**
  - o Jesus is in Jerusalem now and chooses to reject the legalistic customs around the Sabbath when he encounters a person who had been suffering physically for 38 years. We're not told exactly what they were suffering with but Jesus ignores the rules set out by the leaders and heals this person on the Sabbath. God Among Us shows care for the suffering takes precedence over religious customs. They prioritize the person and their wholeness.
- **John 6. Jesus feeds the hungry.**
  - o Jesus is now by the Sea of Galilee, teaching a large group of people who have come to follow him, listen to him, witness him. The people are hungry, so Jesus provides a miraculous meal. God Among Us shows concern for the physical needs of people, providing food for the hungry.
- **John 8:1-11. Jesus and the Woman Caught in Adultery. Jesus offers compassion, not condemnation.**
  - o Jesus is at the temple courts teaching people and some religious leaders bring before him a woman who was caught in adultery. These leaders are out to accuse Jesus, to condemn him, so they use this woman to do so. Giving no thought to the actual person here, they want to trap Jesus offering compassion to a woman their law says they should stone to death. They hound Jesus to give an answer, not letting up. So Jesus says, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." (8:7). This response silences the crowd and slowly they begin leaving, recognizing not one of them is without sin. When all are gone Jesus

turns to the woman and speaks compassion. God Among Us caring for the person, offering compassion rather than condemnation.

- **John 9. Jesus heals a man born blind. Jesus confronts harmful ideology/doctrine.**
  - o Jesus and his disciples encounter a man blind from birth and the disciples ask “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (9:2). The assumption being that this physical ailment was from God as a result of sin. Jesus heals this man, again caring for the actual person in front of him. But Jesus also confronts the harmful theology present here. In answer to this question about whose sin caused this man’s blindness, Jesus replies “Neither this man nor his parents”. God didn’t curse this man to be blind for life because of their sin. That isn’t how God works. God Among Us recognizes harmful theology, how it impacts and hurts people, and confronts it.
- **John 11. Death of Lazarus. Jesus comes alongside of the suffering.**
  - o Jesus’ friend, and Mary and Martha’s brother Lazarus dies. Jesus loved this family we’re told and when he arrives he sees their pain and suffering and is moved to weeping himself. God Among Us doesn’t avoid the suffering of people but comes alongside.
- **John 13. Jesus washes the disciple’s feet. Jesus serves in humility.**
  - o Jesus knows he is coming to the end of his earthly life and is sharing a meal with his friends, his disciples. We’re told that Jesus knew his identity as the One from God and in light of this, he takes the position of a servant and washes the feet of his friends. God Among Us comes in humility and gentleness, serving in humility.
- *Jesus offers peace and love (John 14:27, 15:9)*
- *Jesus Welcomes Back into the Fold One who Betrayed Him (John 21)*

Now, I could go on but this gives us an idea of who God is among us, their priorities, their values, their heart. This is the One we’re invited to give witness to, to live as ambassadors of. Called to walk in the same posture, embodying Jesus here and now. Through doing so, we can prepare people to encounter this Love Made Flesh. We can provide opportunities and facilitate encounters with this Divine Presence, with the Source of love, joy, peace, kindness, and goodness.

And I feel the need to clarify that when I say this I don’t mean the evangelistic understanding of ‘being a witness’ as trying to get people to pray a ‘sinner’s prayer’, trying to ‘convert’ people or get them into the church necessarily, though it may happen at times. I can get uncomfortable with ‘witness’ language if people are treated like projects, if people and their history and culture is devalued, if manipulation is employed. If the focus is getting a person to ‘convert to Christianity’ regardless of the psychological or emotional or spiritual harm we do in the process...I can’t do it. Because again, I think what we see in Jesus, in the stories we just reflected on, is genuine care for the person. Compassion for the unique and specific person is prioritized over the religious institution and their rules and customs, over doctrines and beliefs, over ‘growing the movement’ or adding number, over society’s dividing lines.

One of the things that continues to draw me further into Anabaptism is what I would say is a more holistic view of 'salvation.' The focus being not as much on adherence to specific theological stances but on bringing wholeness and holistic blessing to people and the world. Caring not just for the spiritual lives of people, but giving attention to the physical, economical, emotional, psychological, relational, ecological.

## **5. Conclusion:**

Last week, in reflecting on the coming of Jesus into our world, I said that God, Love, was not content to remain only in the conceptual realm. Rather, they put flesh on and give us a tangible, living, breathing picture of who God is, who Love is. By doing so, God invites us to follow not just a concept or idea or philosophy or set of doctrines and beliefs, but a tangible, real, living Love. We're invited to live and love as Jesus the Christ did. In so doing, we provide opportunities for people to experience the Divine, to experience the Source of Love and Goodness. This is what I mean by the language of living as Ambassadors, as Witnesses.

And as we reflect on the story of Christmas that we see in Scripture, and the broader story of God Among Us, we see the beautiful posture that God enters our world in. In our Call to Worship we heard "This is how God arrives among us—not in power and might, but in vulnerable love." (Leader, p. 46). God shows up among us in humility, in gentleness, in vulnerability. Not employing force or manipulation or contempt or condemnation. Not treating people as projects. But rather helping people discover again their dignity and value as beloved of God. A God who is good, who is peace, who is Love.

As we move out of the Christmas season and into the New Year may we experience again this ministry of God Among Us, may we go forth in the same posture as Jesus the Christ, may we live as ambassadors of Love Made Flesh.