

**Revelation 1:1-3**

First Sunday after Christmas; St. John, Apostle and Evangelist

**Lessons for the Day: Revelation 1:1-6; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 21:20-25****You've Got To Love John!**

December 27, 2020

*“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.”*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

As I grow older, there have been changes to the way I celebrate Christmas. For one thing, I'm not tossing and turning, waiting for Christmas morning to come so that I can see the presents under the tree or the treats in my stocking. I'm not as worried about taking those new gifts and playing with them or putting them to use right away (unless it is something like a new computer or cell phone). If I receive new clothes, I don't feel I need to wear them before the week is out. By comparison, my grandchildren open every package and have to try out every toy right away. Game pieces are already all over the place. I don't blame them. I was that way when I was their age, too. Maybe, just maybe, I've learned some patience over the years.

Yet there are many things about Christmas that haven't changed for me, and I pray that they never do. Some are special, but not essential: I still like to see the Christmas lights and like to see my house decorated, even if I do find it harder to do this each year. There are those movies I always have to watch, like *It's a Wonderful Life* and *White Christmas*. But of absolute importance and necessity is the celebration of the Christ Child, who is born to save us. I want to remember, in word and in song, the great mystery of a love so great that the Eternal Son descends from heaven to take His place with sinners like you and me, so that He can bring us forgiveness and life through His death and resurrection. I look forward to sharing this good news with God's people as we gather in worship on Christmas Eve, as we celebrate the Incarnation on Christmas Day and as we go through these twelve days of Christmas, rejoicing in God's presence with us.

What matters to me more and more, year after year, is the very thing that seems to matter less and less to so many. It isn't just a cliché to say that Christmas is Christ. He is at the heart of everything that is near and dear to me at Christmas. It is the good news of the Saviour that I want to share and which I pray dwells in the hearts of my children and grandchildren and all people. It isn't just knowing the Christmas story—it is believing what the angel said to the shepherds: *“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.”* (Luke 2:10-11, ESV) This good news is for you! A Saviour is born for you! He is God's gift to you, to me, to all people. Christ is Christmas and we trust Him and live in Him as we look to all the days ahead.

That is why we are so blessed through the ministry of the apostle we remember today. On this third day of Christmas the church remembers St. John, apostle and evangelist. In our gospel lesson for today, John refers to himself as *the disciple whom Jesus loved* (John 21:20 - ESV) He wasn't boasting that Jesus liked him more than the other disciples. John knew that he was a sinner. He wasn't just talking to us when he said: *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”* (1 John 1:8, ESV) He knew that was true for himself, and he marvelled that the Lord could—and did—love even him.

In our text, John says he was given a revelation of what must soon take place, and that he *bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw*. That was John's God-given task as an apostle and as an evangelist. He was to bear witness to God's truth. In our epistle lesson, John says: *“that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. But he also says: And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”* (1 John 1:3-4, ESV) John was blessed to be one of Jesus' apostles. He gets excited, almost giddy, when he talks about who Jesus is and what He has done. As we hear the testimony of *the disciple whom Jesus loved* (John 21:20 - ESV), we have to say, “you've got to love John”, because his wonderful testimony has been the way in which the Holy Spirit has brought many to faith in our dying and rising Saviour.

A strong tradition in church history suggests that John was Jesus' cousin—that John's mother, Salome, and Jesus' mother, Mary, were sisters (both being daughters of Joachim and Anna of Jerusalem). Although John may have been as much as 10 years younger than Jesus, it is not unrealistic to think that since he and Jesus were cousins, they may have talked together and played together as boys; perhaps they had wonderful talks together about the Scriptures, much like Jesus did with the teachers and elders at the temple in Jerusalem when he was only 12 years old. It is possible that Mary and Joseph thought Jesus was with

John's family when they left Jerusalem after they had gone up for the Passover, which is why they didn't realize at first that He wasn't with them. It may have been this long connection that made them close to one another. John was part of the "inner circle" of the disciples, along with his brother James, and Simon Peter. We know that he outlived the other apostles, that he was exiled on the island of Patmos, but died at a good old age while living in Ephesus.

But you've got to love John for the very thing that became most important to him: his strong witness to Jesus as the Word made flesh, God with us in person. In the early days of the church, when he and Peter are censured by the Jewish leaders and forbidden to speak of the risen Christ, they responded: **"Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."** (Acts 4:19-20, ESV)

How blessed we are that John couldn't contain his joy in the truth of the Saviour! There is an old fable that says when the Holy Spirit brings you to faith, that the Scripture verse that was key to your conversion is recorded by your name in the Book of Life. If that were true, how many people would have John 3:16 beside their name?! Yes, it is Jesus who says: **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."** (John 3:16, ESV) But it is John who brings those words to us. It is John who comforts us in our guilt and shame, assuring us: **"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."** (1 John 2:1, ESV) It is John who assures us that we are loved by God, as he tells us: **"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."** (1 John 3:1-2, ESV)

Called by Jesus, loved by Him; forgiven through the Saviour who died in his place, and blessed with a living hope through a living Lord, John served as an apostle and as an evangelist. You've got to love John, because his service to his Lord has meant life and salvation for the many who have heard and believed his words, either through the inspired Scriptures themselves, or as those words were passed on from those who believed through John's preaching and then themselves went forth as evangelists to share the good news that had been given to them.

That is our privilege, too. By faith, we know what John knew about Jesus. No, we haven't seen His glory in the same way that John saw it. We didn't have the privilege to sit at Jesus' feet for Bible study. Yet the Holy Spirit has worked in us so that we, too can say we are the disciples whom Jesus loves. We, who have sinned, who do sin day by day in countless ways still know that **the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."** (John 1:14, ESV) Instead of judging us and condemning us, He saved us by paying the price for our sins through His death on the cross. He frees us from the power of sin and from death as He rises to life as the Victorious, Conquering Lord. John says to us: **Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.** We are blessed through the ministry of John and charged to carry on the ministry of John.

That is why we also go, in the strength of God the Holy Spirit to bear witness to Christ; to His love and grace. We aren't always good at being disciples. I can tell you that John had his problems, too. Once, when a Samaritan village did not welcome Christ openly, the Sons of Thunder, James and John, ask Jesus, **"Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"** (Luke 9:54, ESV) Jesus rebuked them and reminded them that they still had much to learn about ministering in the name of the Lord. We also see James and John asking Jesus: **"Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."** (Mark 10:37, ESV) They wanted privilege and rank. No, John wasn't any less a sinner than we are. But he was forgiven. Jesus loved him. Jesus loves us and forgives us, too!

In a different, yet no less life-changing way, we have seen what John saw. We see the Word made flesh. We see Him as He comes to us in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. We see His glory revealed in the pages of Holy Scripture, in the divinely inspired testimony of John. You've got to love John, because we learn so much of God's love for us through him. As the hymn writer says: *For Your belov'd disciple Exiled to Patmos' shore, And for his faithful record, We praise You evermore. Praise for the mystic vision Through him to us revealed; May we, in patience waiting, With Your elect be sealed.* (LSB 517, st. 8) Amen.