

**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas**  
**Year B 12/31/2017**  
**John 1:1-18**  
**"This happened!"**

A year is coming to an end; and a new year is about to begin.

Some of us have already thought about resolutions, promises that we are making to ourselves about things in this coming new year we wish to have different – lose weight, drink less tonight, be kinder to those we love, work harder, come to church more often, teach Sunday School again, and on and on ...

It is a fascinating way to enter the new year when you think about, making promises that most of us already know we will break.

A new year – new possibilities – reshaped priorities – new chances – but look at how we are beginning this new year in our Gospel reading – we are returning to the story of the beginning of all things in the words of John’s gospel.

It is the Christmas story told in the words of: ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of the world. (King James Version)***

Evelyn Underhill was an Anglican mystic and writer of the early days of the last century. In one of her works, she stated that the primary declaration of the Christian faith is **NOT** as perhaps what we are more accustomed to hearing in some more modern ways of being Christian as ***“Do not do this!”***

Or even a statement like ***“Instead do this!”***

Underhill says that the primary declaration of the Christian faith is **“This happened!”** [literally **“God did this for us!”**]

**“This happened!”** [Evelyn Underhill (2002). *“Worship”*, p.68, Wipf and Stock Publishers]

John’s gospel tells us why “it” happened and that it had been part of God’s plan from the beginning of time!

The incarnation [that is God with human skin on] is not a belief in some spiritual presence of God in the world or in a feeling of the nearness of God in our hearts.

BUT is literally the earthiness of God; God in skin; God in the particularities of a family, in geography, in politics, in history. It is the real world of flesh and blood that God has invaded with the most sacred gift of all -- the gift of God's own self.

Holy Scripture has many ways of stating things -- many ways of revealing how God has interacted with the people of creation -- many ways of revealing the truth and mystery of people in relationship with almighty God.

Sometimes the mysteries and truths can only or at least *best* be expressed as poetry that is expressed in poetic terms for nothing less can describe something so full of grace and wonder -- nothing less than poetic speech can convey the facts of something so great as "**This happened!**"

*This happened* and now we must deal with knowing that this happened -- BUT simple knowledge is never enough -- knowing that this happened is a kind of Christianity based upon the perfection of humanity through knowing all the facts.

Many in their Christian walk concentrate solely on the knowing --- but is simple knowing about something ever enough for you?

Knowledge is only of value IF it somehow changes our lives and makes us better people -- without change knowledge is simply information!

There was once a debate taking place in a comparative religions conference, the wise and the scholarly were in a spirited debate about what is unique about Christianity.

Someone suggested what set Christianity apart from other religions was the concept of incarnation, the idea that God became incarnate in human form.

But someone quickly said, "Well, actually, other faiths believe that God appears in human form."

Another suggestion was offered: what about resurrection? The belief that death is not the final word. That the tomb was found empty. Someone slowly shook his head.

Other religions have accounts of people returning from the dead.

Then, as the story is told, C.S. Lewis walked into the room, tweed jacket, pipe, and an armful of papers, a little early for his presentation. He sat down and took in the conversation, which had by now evolved into a fierce debate.

Finally during a lull, he spoke saying, "what's all this rumpus about?"

Everyone turned in his direction. Trying to explain themselves they said, "We're debating what's unique about Christianity." "Oh, that's easy," answered Lewis, "it's grace" -- it's that God would take on human form simply to save people like us -- people who would rather debate the

correctness of belief than live out the faith represented by God's actions – people who would rather know about the faith of Christ than live in relationship with him – people who are satisfied with knowledge! [Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 45.]

All of this poetic beauty of John's gospel introduction falls upon us as we prepare to celebrate the beginning of a new year – as we in some ways celebrate living through another one and have a great opportunity to party!

As we think about the possibilities of this new year being thrust upon us, remember the words “In the beginning God ...” and remember that it has been this way every since and that the year is called 2018 doesn't change anything.

I ask you to look at your resolutions – what would our lives look like if we only one of our new year's resolutions had to do with our spiritual lives?

What if for our daily mantra or motto, we used the words “in the beginning God ...” and live our lives as such?

I am convinced that if we did, all things will be better in our hearts, in our minds and in our souls.