

December 25, 2021 – John 1:1-18

I think we've all done it. Someone hands you a gift – a pretty box wrapped up with colorful paper and a fancy bow. You receive it with gratitude. You hold it up. You test its weight. You shake it a little to see if it makes a noise. You judge its size. And you try to guess what's inside.

I don't know exactly why we do it. We're just gonna pull away that bow and tear off that wrapping paper in a few seconds anyway. There's no reward for guessing correctly. But we do it anyway.

It's a game. A game in deductive reasoning. Because we know that a box the size of a book cannot contain a television. A box that weighs less than a pound cannot contain a bowling ball. A large amount of stuff cannot be contained in a box that only has room for a small amount of stuff. Or, as Aristotle once said, “finitum non est capax infiniti.” The finite cannot contain the infinite.

Now, that's a good rule of thumb when it comes to wrapping Christmas presents. Or, as my family from Ohio found out, loading a car for a trip to Missouri. But it's not a good rule to apply to God. Even though we often try to do so.

John Calvin, for example, based a lot of really bad theology off of that very premise. It's one of the main reasons that the Reformed deny the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper. The finite cannot contain the infinite. God can't be in bread and wine.

Except, he can. The infinite can do whatever he wants to do. Including make himself very, very small. Which is what Christmas is all about.

A truly infinite God, bigger than all of space and time, making himself a tiny infant. Small enough to be born of the virgin Mary. Small enough to be wrapped in cloths. Small enough to lay in a manger. The infinite God can do whatever he wants. Including make himself finite. Including make himself human.

But this really shouldn't surprise us. Because this isn't the first time that our very big God has made himself very, very small. In the Old Testament, we read about God doing the same thing all the time.

We've been talking about many of these moments throughout our Advent series recently. The infinite God became a single burning bush, so that he might speak to Moses. The infinite God became a cloud that entered the Tabernacle and was contained in a tiny room, only 30 feet across, so that he might dwell among his people. The infinite God worked through a weak man named Gideon and a tiny army of 300 soldiers so that the Israelites might know that he can do truly infinite things through the most finite means.

So it really should be no surprise to us at all when an angel shows up to a single young maiden named Mary and tells her, “You are going to contain the infinite God. Your womb will contain the fullness of God made flesh. You will be the mother of your Lord.” And when she asks how this can be, the angel simply replies, “He'll make it happen. Nothing is impossible with God.”

St John tells us in our Gospel Lesson this morning that the God who was in the beginning, who was with God and who was God, who made everything in the entire universe, in whom was the very life of all mankind, this same God became flesh and dwelt among us. Tabernacled among us. Filled our tiny world with his immense glory.

Not the glory of the Lord that makes us afraid, like we talked about last night. But the glory of the Lord that gives us grace and truth. The glory of the Gospel.

And throughout John's Gospel, he continues to emphasize the infinite God who is made finite. An infinite God who does signs and wonders and miracles that fill his disciples with awe. And yet also a finite man, who tells them, “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*”

An infinite God who breathes upon his disciples the very Holy Spirit. And yet also a finite man, who tells Thomas, “*Put your finger here, and see my hands;*” My human hands. “*Put out your hand, and place it in my side.*” My human side. “*Do not disbelieve, but believe.*” Because you have seen and touched the living God.

We so often think of the mystery of the divine being the infinite wonder of an unknowable God. A God who is so big, so powerful, so wise, that He is beyond our comprehension. But St John teaches us that the true mystery of God is the finite wonder of his incarnation. The fact that this infinite God became flesh. Became a man like us. That the finite contained the infinite.

And that this finite man who was also the infinite God then suffered and died for us small, finite creatures. *“The Word became flesh... and we have seen his glory.”* This wasn't some philosophical, theological abstract for John. He saw this man die on the cross. He saw the glory of God crucified for us. That's a mystery that ruins all our logic and philosophy and human understanding.

Which, quite frankly, has always made it hard for people to believe. Look at the polls and the studies and you'll find that there are a great many people in this country who believe that there is a god. Contrary to what you might think, we have not become a nation of atheists. The belief in something divine is actually quite common.

But that doesn't mean we are a nation of Christians either. And so what John said in our lesson is still true today. *“He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.”* You see, we're very good at believing in a god who fits into our rules. Who makes logical sense to us. Who fits into our philosophy, our worldview, our understanding.

But he problem with that is that we are finite creatures with finite minds. We can't conceive of the infinite or what the infinite should be. And when we think about God in finite terms, we end up with a very small god.

A god who cannot become flesh. A god who cannot save us. A god who doesn't know us. Doesn't care about us. Doesn't do much of anything. When the finite cannot contain the infinite, then the infinite can't do much for the finite at all.

Which leaves us to do all the work. It leaves us to save ourselves, through good works and self-righteousness. It leaves us to figure out whether God really loves us. It leaves us to bear the weight of sin and figure out justice for ourselves. And God? Well, God isn't really necessary.

Christianity without the incarnation is nothing. Christianity without God coming to us in the water of baptism and the bread and wine of Holy Communion is nothing. Christianity without the work of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct God's people into lives of holiness and love for our neighbor is nothing.

The whole thing falls upon without a God who makes himself known to us in flesh and blood. Thomas doubted everything until His eyes saw the body of his resurrected Lord. And at that moment, he cried out, *“My Lord and my God.”* We will doubt everything unless our eyes look with faith upon the body of our Lord, born of Mary and risen from the dead. Only then will we cry out *“My Lord and my God.”*

And at that moment, the finite will contain the infinite in one more way. For our finite minds will grasp the infinite love of our Lord. Our finite lips will speak the infinite grace of Jesus Christ. Our finite feet will bring the infinitely good news of Christmas to all the world.

This Christmas, you hold in your hands a gift that is bigger than the box that contains it. For you hold in your hands the gift of God's Word. The infinite Word that was made finite flesh still comes to shine a light in the darkness of this world.

He shines a light in the darkness of your life. And he shines a light in the darkness for everyone you meet. Because this gift is for you and for your children and for all who are far off. Everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that by believe you may have life in his name. And that is a gift far bigger than the box it comes in. Amen.