

## NATIVITY OF OUR LORD: CHRISTMAS DAY | DECEMBER 25, 2020

ISAIAH 52:7-10 | PSALM 98 | HEBREWS 1:1-12 | JOHN 1:1-14

A few years ago, the New York *Times* ran an unusual Super Bowl ad. Sandwiched in between celebrity-studded commercials for Doritos and Bud Light Lime, the ad stood out for its simplicity. It simply showed phrases beginning with *The truth is...* all building up to *The truth is more important than ever*. No gimmicks. No celebrities. No water cooler-worthy moment. The whole point of the ad is that the truth sells itself.

We want the truth. If you read a newspaper, you want to read about what's actually happening. If you want an estimate on a car repair, you want to know how much it is actually going to cost. And if you ask your child what grade they got on an exam, you want to know what grade they actually got, not what grade they think they deserved.

We want the truth because we want to know what we can rely on. To live in a world without truth is to live in a world in which nothing is reliable, most things are contingent, and everything is negotiable. It's not a coincidence that totalitarian regimes gain power by flooding people with false information. If you don't know what's true, you can't trust anyone. And living without trust is no way to live at all. So we check the sourcing of a news article. We get a second opinion about the car. We go to the parent-teacher conference. We try to find out what is actually going on. The truth is good.

But the truth can also be difficult to hear. Sometimes it's easier not to know the truth. Maybe you've had that experience where you know something in the back of your mind, but you go out of your way not to confirm it. When you see a complicated situation, you might even say, "I don't want to know." Learning the truth about the world, other people, and, God forbid, ourselves, can be incredibly uncomfortable and difficult.

The way many of us encounter the difficult truths is through relationships: friendships, marriages, and partnerships, in particular. When we know people intimately, when we spend time with them in the mundane ordinariness of life, we get to see who they truly are. Sometimes, that truth is for the better. But other times, that truth is for the worse.

St. John is aware of our ambivalent relationship with the truth. He knows that the truth isn't always comforting or reassuring. That sometimes truth can be difficult. And sometimes we'd rather not know the truth. But John tells us that Jesus is a different kind of truth. When John says that Jesus is the truth, he doesn't just mean that Jesus is the truth in the way that the sky is blue and gravity pulls toward the center of the earth and today is Friday. He doesn't just mean it as a fact. He means that Jesus is the same regardless of what we do. That even before we were here, Jesus was in the beginning with God. That God is God no matter what we think about it. He's telling us that Jesus is worthy of our trust.

And perhaps that's why he tells us that Jesus is not just full of truth but full of grace as well. Grace and truth need each other. That for us to understand the truth, for us to appreciate all that is going on in the world and in ourselves, we need a bit of grace and forgiveness. I can speak truthfully about my failures when I know others will give me the grace of being less than perfect. And I can exhibit grace to others when I know they are being honest and truthful with me.

We often tend to think that grace and truth don't go together. That if you are truthful with someone, you can't exhibit grace. And if you show someone grace, you're hiding parts of the truth. But John says that it's actually the opposite. That real truths can only be discovered, appreciated, and internalized when we are shown grace. The only sins we can truly confess are the ones we believe can be forgiven. The only failures we can truly address with are the ones we believe can be reconciled. The only deaths we can truly accept are those we believe can be redeemed.

So what we find on Christmas morning is not simply a fact or a statement or a proposition. But a new kind of relationship. That this child in the manger, the Word from the beginning, is worthy of our trust.

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There is no other shoe to drop. There is no “real” Jesus you’ll come to know later. There is no God behind God. This is a God you can rely on.

And if trusting Jesus is difficult, and it surely is for the people in St. John’s gospel, then there is grace along the way. The grace to make mistakes, the grace to falter, the grace to try again, the grace to grow, the grace we need to be in relationship with God and with one another.

To live with grace and truth is to be able to see one another face-to-face. To speak about our problems open and honestly. To not hide behind lies and obfuscations but to encounter one another as we are. Christmas brings us face-to-face with God. For Joseph and Mary and the shepherds, that’s literally true. But that face-to-face encounter is no less real for us. In Jesus, God sees us as we are. He gives us enough grace to hear the truth about ourselves, and he teaches us the truth so that we can show grace to others.

After all the party of Christmas Eve is over, John points us back to the manger and says, This is someone you can trust. This is someone you can rely on. This is someone you can grow with. For this is a life full of full of grace and truth, the glory of the Father’s only Son.

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