

JOHN 1:9-12
AN EXPOSITION FOR
CHRISTMAS 2003

"Hearts That See"

Rev. Dr. Jonathan C. Naumann
Redeemer Lutheran Church
Oakmont, Pennsylvania

- 9: *The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.*
- 10: *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him.*
- 11: *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*
- 12: *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*

This Gospel reading today gets right to the heart of today's theme, "Hearts That See." And this reading gets right to the heart of the problem with so many of us, namely that so often our hearts do not see.

In today's Gospel reading, St. John wrote, "*No one has ever seen God, but God – the One and Only – has made Him known*" (John 1.18).

The questions we human beings have about God are quite obvious. Who is God? What is He like? What does He want? Has anybody ever seen Him?

St. John tells us that no one has ever seen God. How then are we to know what He is like? How do we get to know this God of ours who rolls up His sleeves and gets dirty taking away the

sins of the world – this God who does the work of washing, cleaning, building, and repairing broken humanity – this God who's willing to sacrifice to get the job done, who's willing to make tough decisions that won't always be popular, and who has adopted such a generous attitude toward the idea of having us in his family?

Throughout this Christmas season, this God *has come to us* and blessed us through His Word.

The problem is, as John says, "*[Christ] was in the world, . . . the world did not recognise Him (John 1.10)*". Unfortunately, His arrival did not conform to public expectation, did not measure up to *people's* standards. That was and is a problem.

People looking for a God in their own image, shaped and formed according to their understanding and desires, were and continue to be disappointed.

This is why "*no one has ever seen God*." We suffer from a kind of astigmatism of the soul. . .cataracts over the heart. . .short-sighted desires without far-sighted faith. We see what we want to see, not what we need to see. That's why so many of us simply don't see Him.

Fortunately, we can be encouraged by considering how throughout history there have been "hearts that see."

You may remember how St. Paul once said, "*I pray . . . that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you*

may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints' (Ephesians 1.18).

God's Word tells us the ability to see with the heart comes from God who pours into our hearts the gift of faith. This faith brings with it a divine in-sight that produces a hope that doesn't disappoint us. We are brought to rejoice despite what we see around us with our eyes.

Faith in our hearts can see further than our physical surroundings. Faith can see all the way through this life to the eternal promises of God. That *inner* sight which we receive from God – that is, faith – produces a hope that works for today! It works for us in the real world of pain and problems, toil and trouble.

That heaven-sent hope says, with the voice of God, "Remember, you are holy and blameless in my sight." Knowing that God sees us with a heart of love even in the tight spots and difficulties of life gives us all the reassurance we need to make it through today.

God's looking at us in grace was a *"choice He made before the creation of the world. In Christ we are holy and blameless in His sight (Ephesians 1.4)."*

So our being saved depends NOT on our eyesight but God's, NOT on our heart, but His.

God wants to rescue His people and His heart sees just what is needed. So He chooses to find us. Adam and Eve hid out in the garden. God called to

them, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3.9). Cain killed his brother Abel. God asked, 'Where is your brother Abel?' (Genesis 4.9).

Did God really not know? Was He really having trouble seeing where His people were? Of course not. He could see them – all too well!! He could see them with His eyes, so to speak, but He chose to look at them with His heart – to confront them with their blindness, their disobedience, their rebellion, their need – to drive them to His mercy.

When God looks at you and me with His heart, He always looks at us in mercy, and then He sees us. If God were to look at us the other way, through His Law rather than His Gospel, it would be better for us NOT to be found!

Christmas time invites us again to look with our hearts – *"to look where your treasure is, for there will your heart be also"* (Luke 12.34).

The Wise Men (Magi) saw a simple star in the sky, but their hearts saw a new born king, so they set out on a long journey to a foreign country (Matthew 2.1-2).

Shepherds saw angels in a starry sky, but their hearts saw the fulfilment of a long awaited promise. Two new parents saw midnight feedings, sleepless nights, and nappies, but their hearts saw Immanuel, "God with us."

We like to think that we look with our eyes wide open, but sometimes it is best to look with the heart of faith.

So today, think of the beliefs we cannot see, but that are true nonetheless.

We can't see Baptism's water and Word washing away sin and breaking the hold of the devil.

We can't see the old Adam die and the new Adam arise.

We can't see the body and blood of Christ somehow within the bread and wine.

We can't see God with us always.

We can't see the Son carrying our sins and defeating the Devil.

We can't see the Holy Spirit giving the gift of faith and interceding with sighs too deep for words.

We can't see heaven's angels protecting and defending us and accompanying us through life.

Still, we Christians believe these promises from God. We have spiritual eyes that see, because we have been given in-sight – a heart that sees God.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, to life everlasting. Amen.